

## SABARIA

Out of the red "cultural" bus from Budapest three men stepped into picturesque Szombathely, which stands upon the ruins of the old Roman city of Sabaria : a priest with a political past : an archaeologist who has spent several years in the wilderness; and a lung specialist who is too valuable to be purged. These men, chosen at random for the honour of this, the first "cultural tour", find themselves accidentally involved in the arrest of a poor, half-mad, little old seamstress who claims that her sewing-machine has spoken to her in the voice of St. Martin. They are taken away to be witnesses at her interrogation deep underground at the headquarters of the secret police, and there they discover the real reason for her arrest.

This dramatic story about the clash between Communism and the Catholic Church in Hungary, is certainly the finest work which this very distinguished writer has yet had translated into English. It must surely rank among the handful of great novels that have come to us from behind the Iron Curtain.

# *Sabaria*

*by*

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## *Contents*

### PART I

#### THE STATUE OF JUPITER

##### *Chapter*

I	The red "Cultural Bus"	9
II	The Memorial Garden	22
III	Socialist Culture	32
IV	Piroska Szabó	41
V	Interrogation	47

### PART II

##### *Chapter*

I	The polka-dotted blue material	61
II	The shiny silver party dress	90
III	The winter coat of his Excellency the Bishop	120
IV	Exit Dr. Kis	148
V	His Excellency the Bishop	166
VI	Páter Nádor is led into temptation	197
VII	The red "cultural bus"	221





# PART I

## THE STATUE OF JUPITER



## *Chapter I*

### *The red "Cultural Bus"*

Early one morning in a large red bus containing forty-six lucky passengers left Budapest for Szombathely. It belonged to the IBUSZ tourist organization and was commonly known as a "cultural bus". Although Stalin was still alive in the Kremlin, these people were being allowed to visit an area very near the Austrian frontier, for "cultural reasons".

Szombathely, (the ancient Roman town of Sabaria), might well claim to have some kind of cultural heritage in Hungary. In the first century B.C. it had been the most eastern town in the Roman Empire; it was now the most western town in another, equally extensive, empire. The frontier between Russian occupied Europe and the west was only fifty miles away, at Bucsa, or twenty kilometres at Pernoapati; and Hungarians who wished to flee the country generally chose the second place for crossing, as it was easier to hide there from the "green Ávo", the Communist frontier guard. Even by exceptional charabanc standards, the bus was enormous, a product of the national automobile factory, which normally constructed them for the Chinese People's Republic.

Only recently the Deputy Chairman of the IBUSZ tourist organization had been arrested, together with the Chief Accountant; and these IBUSZ tours had been resurrected. Just as no one had known why IBUSZ had been neglected for so long, so no one now knew why it had been revived; although everyone realized, of course, that

there must be a close connection between the arrests of the officials and the statement later made by the Minister for Public Education, that "the Government is now organizing cultural journeys through IBUSZ for the working people of Hungary".

The IBUSZ offices in the Vigado Palace looking onto the Danube had not been damaged during the war, and they now advertised these cultural tours in their windows:

Conducted Cultural Tour! To Szombathely, ancient city of the greatest slave trading power of antiquity—the Roman Empire! Then called Sabaria. To see the Roman excavations. Applications between June and September 1952 to be made at the offices of all Trades Unions, or personally at tourist offices.

Two posters showed indistinct views of Szombathely—one, the twin towers of the cathedral; the other, part of an ancient statue. According to the second poster, the statue was part of a hexagon erected two thousand years ago in homage to Jupiter.

For weeks before the first "culture tour", people had gathered in Vigado Square before the IBUSZ shop window, excitedly discussing the new development. Some, the optimists, were delighted, thinking this might herald a return to the old days, of travel, of sight-seeing and holidays away from home, (but naturally not to the old days when there had been no Five Year Plan). In their wildest dreams they did not envisage the bus going beyond the boundaries of Hungary, to such foreign parts as Vienna! A more cautious element viewed the poster with suspicion. Was it possible after the economies of the Three Year Plan, and the large reparations still being paid to the Soviet Union, that today, in the middle of another, even more rigid Five Year Plan, the Government should waste petrol on sending ordinary people from Budapest

to Szombathely, to look at a few old excavations? These sceptics were secretly convinced that the twin towers of the Szombathely Cathedral in the picture served the same purpose as the chalices, chasubles and other religious objects displayed in a certain prominent Budapest shop window—to make uninitiated foreigners believe that the Government, far from persecuting the churches, was actually organizing trips to visit them. They eyed the hexagon with even greater distrust, refusing to believe that it had anything to do with the alleged cult of Jupiter. (Incidentally, hadn't it rather a curious resemblance to those statues of Cardinals, Generals, and politicians which had been mutilated in the early days of 1905, when Soviet soldiers were "liberating" Budapest?).

But neither of these two groups in front of the IBUSZ shop window, the sanguine and the cynical, would have dared express such feelings openly. For years now they had learnt never to say what they thought. They just stood there in silence, staring, or rather glaring, at the picture of Jupiter; and if the lips of some of them seemed to be moving, no sound came out. They might have been repeating the words of the poster. They might also have been cursing the régime.

The poster informed those who were interested that Sabaria was founded by the Roman Emperor Claudius. Someone in the crowd looked at this and whispered, "Ah yes, he thought he was God too".

Nothing happened.

The people standing beside him looked at one another, but they did not laugh. They had forgotten how to smile a long time ago, and their faces remained grey and impassive as they read the rest of the poster :

The archaeologists of the Hungarian People's Republic, on the orders of the Party and the Government, are con-

tinuing with unflagging zeal the excavation of the ancient memorials, including the tombs of the veterans of the Fifteenth Legion, generally distinguished by the adjective "Apollonian". These are on display in the memorial gardens of Szombathely, enabling the workers of Hungary to see something of the lives led by members of the greatest ancient slave trading empire. Jupiter's hexagon is one of the exhibits.

"What does hexagon mean?" asked someone.

"We haven't been taught that in the Party Seminary," said another man.

For days the IBUSZ offices had been invaded by applicants for tickets; both optimists and cynics were lured by the thought of a Sunday journey through the mountains of the Bakony. It seemed as if all Budapest wanted to travel to Szombathely.

The applicants' credentials were carefully scrutinized, and only after a study of the files and confidential reports were the names of the lucky ones announced.

The first big red bus left Vigadó Square that early June morning surrounded by a throng of admirers, the friends and relations of the fortunate tourists. One of these had been accompanied to the square by his wife who, for some reason, had not been able to obtain a ticket, either at her Trade Union office, or at the IBUSZ office, although she had implored the "cultural officer" to allow her to accompany her husband. The reverse had also occurred. In some cases, a hard working wife was allowed a ticket, while her husband had to stay behind to look after the children. The friends and relations waved good-bye rather as they might in the harbour of Naples to a ship full of emigrants sailing for South America. Some of them even wept.

When the cultural bus turned into Deák Ference Street and disappeared from view—having actually *started* on

its journey—their expressions of pleasure at their friends' good fortune changed to bewilderment. What good reason could be behind the Government's expenditure of so much petrol on such a useless journey? The answer—that the Government for once really wanted these people to enjoy a "cultural tour"—was quite incomprehensible to them.

\* \* \*

It was a fine summer morning as they crossed Budapest's great Chain Bridge, and drove along the right embankment of the Danube, where the chestnuts were in bloom. The few bystanders at this early hour stared in astonishment at the bus which bore a large declamatory inscription on its side "Cultural Journey", proclaiming yet another achievement by the Party on the people's behalf. Below the high cliffs of Gellért hill the bus soon overtook the yellow municipal trams, and woke up the sleeping inhabitants of the Buda embankment by hooting incessantly, causing some pedestrians to run for cover as it gathered speed. On its rear another inscription warned cars behind it to "drive carefully"—as though "the father of the Hungarian people", the bald old man who sometimes had a friendly grin for photographers, had thoughtfully inscribed this fatherly advice himself. But the driver of the bus, perhaps because he could not see it, ignored this instruction, and drove dangerously fast. Beside him sat a small snub-nosed woman in uniform, wearing a Soviet model partisan cap which was placed sideways, almost coquettishly, on her head. Her face was well daubed with lipstick, and her red armband and the red starred *IBUSZ* insignia on her cap announced that it was she, not the driver of the bus, who was the real leader of the expedition.

"Don't take up too much room, comrades," she



said, "be considerate! We want you all to be comfortable."

This was impossible, for the manufacturers of the bus, which had been planned originally for Chinamen, had clearly not taken European standards of size and comfort into consideration. It catered for seventy passengers, but there were only forty-six seats; the remaining twenty-four were evidently supposed to stand. Perhaps the manufacturers felt that Chinamen were not over fastidious about these things, or perhaps they thought all Chinamen were small. Anyway, the forty-six seated passengers were squeezed so tightly together in their seats that there was no standing room.

One of the most uncomfortable must have been a fat priest who had been recognized straight away by some of his fellow passengers. He had played a notorious and important part two years before, by collaborating with both the Russians and the Hungarian Communist Party and supporting the dictatorship of the proletariat. But something must have gone wrong, because he was known to be now half in exile, no more than a parish priest in a small village on the river Tisza. That he had been granted a ticket for the cultural bus proved however that he was not entirely out of favour. In political circles, he had been known as "Páter Nádor", and in the early days he had been the spokesman of the renegade part of the Catholic party which had given its vote to the nationalization of the banks.

Although it was cool in the early morning, Páter Nádor's fat face was already covered with drops of sweat which he was constantly mopping with a big polka-dotted handkerchief, and he leant close up against the open window to get air. He was so fat that he took up his own place and half of his neighbour's as well. The unfortunate neighbour who had, after all, paid the full

price for his seat attempted vainly to occupy it completely, but finally gave up, and became resigned to sitting with a part of his bottom hanging in the air. It was his discomfort which had caused the fair-haired IBUSZ girl to say that she wanted everyone to be comfortable. "Try and make room for everyone," she repeated brightly. But no amount of words could make room where there was none. Páter Nádor looked embarrassed; but what could he do? A fat man cannot compress himself, nor can he sit sideways, for Páter Nádor would still have taken up just as much space.

The fair-haired girl with the partisan cap was the only person in the bus who spoke; the rest of the passengers remained completely silent. It was a troubled silence, as if in being taken to see the excavations at Sabaria, they were about to undergo some penance. This girl was a member of the liberated working class population—and in a charming way; not only was she pretty, but the IBUSZ skirt showed off her well shaped hips most provocatively. She was a caretaker's daughter from the Seventh District, that part of the city in which caretaker's daughters despise their mothers' work, carrying dustbins and scrubbing staircases. Many of these pretty creatures had been notorious in the past, before the war, for escaping from their environment and climbing in society. Some had become usherettes and sweet vendors in the theatres and operas; a few had gone on the stage and become well-known actresses. Now those who had any brains were educated in Party Seminaries.

This girl had been chosen as an IBUSZ guide because no foreign languages were required. (At this time, it should be remembered, the only foreigners in Budapest were Russians.)

"We are now passing through Martonvásár, comrades," she announced. "In the distance can be seen the

stately home of the Brunswicks, where Beethoven, that great king of musicians, played the piano." She did not add that this castle, once the property of the Counts of Brunswick, had been looted in 1905 by the liberated people and their liberators, and that the Beethoven momentos, together with all the furniture, had been stolen. Nor did she add that the régime had since set up a scientific research station in the castle, where they were developing new methods for purifying and improving maize production.

"Kápolnásnyék," she announced at the next place, twenty minutes later. "The native town of our great poet Vörösmarty. He wrote one of our national anthems. As well as the famous Song of Fót."

"All right! All right!" muttered the man sitting, or rather balancing, beside Pátor Nádor. "We aren't in the kindergarten."

Although he found the girl attractive, he objected to being told these elementary facts. He was perhaps a little unfair. The girl came from one of the lowest cadres of the Party, which had benefited most from the new régime; everything she knew had been learnt at the Party Seminary. It had been a wonderful experience to realize that the person whose statue she passed every day on her way to work in one of the most beautiful squares of Budapest had been a poet. She had always thought Vörösmarty had been connected in some way with *haute couture*. She was a good-natured girl, well equipped with that boisterous humour so typical of the daughters of Budapest caretakers.

"Now comrades here we are," she announced, "at the bathtub\* of Budapest." They were passing the lake of Velence. "The bathtub has a surface area of twenty-six thousand square kilometres."

\* The Margate or Southend of Budapest.

But when they went through Székesfehérvár, the ancient town of the first Hungarian king, St. Stephen, she almost ignored it. She only mentioned casually that the first king of Hungary had founded a bakery and built a cathedral here. Perhaps it was not her fault that she did not know the king's name; she had probably never heard of it.

They were soon in the Bakony forest region, leaving behind Pétfürdő which, according to the guide, had been a derelict prairie village in the Fascist era, with only two hundred and eight inhabitants. It had now become "the focus of chemical production for our heavy industry, no longer a hindrance but an asset in the chemical section of our Hungarian People's struggle for peace."

Although no one listened attentively, and Páter Nádor scratched his fat red neck, she did her best to draw the attention of the silent, ill-humoured passengers to the beauty of the countryside. "Now we come to the Barát valley, surrounded by its wall of rocks, one of the most beautiful spots in our socialist country." Or when they passed a small lake in the mountains, "Here comrades, we already see the traces of the ancient conquerors. This is the Kékerü lake, turned into a dam two thousand years ago by the imperialists."

When the bus crossed the Völgy Bridge in Veszprém, she spoke at length about the monument to Lenin, omitting any reference to St. Giselle's eighteenth century chapel.

The inhabitants of Veszprém in the main square glared at the bus. They too were not in the best of tempers for although today was Sunday, they were working for the Five Year Plan. The busy smoking factory chimneys revealed that Veszprém was heavily engaged in the sacred cause of war reparations. Even the slaughter-house was at work, (although we should add it was not working for

the benefit of the inhabitants of Veszprém, who had not eaten meat for the last two years).

At the famous inn in the centre of the town whose name had been changed to "The Red Star", the cultural bus stopped and the IBUSZ girl announced, "Ten minutes wait comrades."

The passengers, having all been sitting for two hours on top of one another, got out gladly. Three of them ignored the others and hurried into the hotel, where they were met by grey-faced local party officials wearing Party badges in their lapels. It was immediately clear to everyone that these three men were the real leaders of the tour. They probably represented IBUSZ, the Budapest Party and the "fist of the Party", that is to say, the security police.\*

"Freedom!" said the local party apparatchiks, using the official party greeting as they welcomed the new arrivals.

"Freedom!" replied their Budapest colleagues, who then asked for the hotel W.C. Not even the Party could ensure privileges here, and they had to wait their turn.

One of the passengers whispered, "Ah, so our cultural lady is not one of them."

"Of course she is," said the man who had been sitting next to Páter Nádor. Although this man had hardly bothered to make himself look presentable—his hair was uncombed and he looked as if he hadn't had a wash for a week—he had a shrewd, intelligent face, and the air of a man who knows everything. In his opinion, the most dangerous of the three Budapest officials who had rushed in to greet the locals was the grim faced Swabian-looking youth in a cloth-cap. He vaguely remembered him from the past as an enthusiastic banner carrier on

\* There are the blue AVO, so called on account of their blue flashes and cap bands as opposed to the green AVO or frontier police.

May Day. He now wore a red carnation in his button-hole. The untidy man's surmise was right. The local Party bureaucrats gathered respectfully around the youthful newcomer in the cloth-cap to hear his words. It was impossible to hear what they were saying clearly, but he over-heard one remark of the cloth-cap. "Since all means of power, comrades, are in the hands of the people, it is clear that the power of culture should be placed there too."

They talked until the ten minutes wait had elapsed and then took their places again in the bus, which continued on its journey. The silence among the passengers became even more embarrassing after this little interlude. However unimportant it may have been, it had given them a clear warning that conversation was unwise. To say what one thought could have fatal consequences. Nor was the incident lost on the bus girl who became uneasy. She seemed to have lost interest in her own voice, and for nearly half an hour she did not utter a word.

It was only when the bus crossed the river Marcal, and the beautiful countryside of county Vas, and the famous Kemensalja opened out in the distance before them, that two of the more courageous passengers dared to talk. Their voices seemed an open and ostentatious protest against the cowardly silence of their companions. And the astonishing thing about their conversation was that, contrary to Party practice, they addressed each other as "colleague", not as "comrade". Nor did they use the familiar second person singular, a custom among the upper classes of the old régime as among the comrades of the new. It was clear that they did not belong to the Hungarian Workers' Party.

"What is your opinion, Colleague Magos?"

"About what, Colleague Vida?"

"About the situation, of course."

"You must be out of your mind, Colleague Vida, to ask a question like that!"

"As a matter of fact, I was not thinking of the same thing as you. I was thinking about the frogs."

"You were thinking about the frogs in the collective farms?"

"No."

"Well, what frogs?"

"In Dunabogdány there are thousands of frogs in the reeds. They croak day and night. Yet it is not the frogs who are right."

"Well, who do you think is right?"

"Why, the swallows of course, Colleague Magos."

"Is that so?"

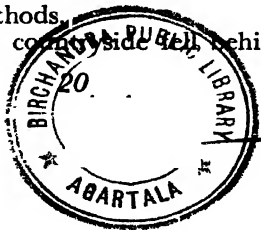
"It is so, Colleague Magos."

"Well, let's get this quite clear, you say the swallows are right?"

Vida did not answer immediately, as if contemplating how far he could go. He glanced at the three grey-faced silent passengers on the other side of the bus, but they appeared to be paying no attention and so he decided to take the plunge. He cleared his throat and said, "Yes, I definitely believe, Colleague Magos, that the swallows are right."

After this odd conversation silence fell again, and the bus passed through the village of Herend, the Hungarian Sèvres, where a hundred and twenty years before, a clever apprentice had founded the famous china factory. It had recently been nationalized by the State, taken from his rapacious heirs, who had then been exiled by the infuriated population. The bus also passed Ajka, famous for its "Hungarian silver", the bauxite which now produced quantities of aluminium for the Soviet Union, using stakhanovite methods.

At last the Bakony came side by side behind and they



entered Kemenesalja. There was still no general conversation in the bus. The pretty little IBUSZ girl sat glumly beside the driver, and the shabby unbrushed man sat uncomfortably beside the fat priest, and everyone looked miserable and bad tempered.

At last in the distance Szombathely, the ancient Roman Sabaria, founded by the God Emperor Claudius, came into view. The cultural bus went past the old Christian cemetery and Dominican church, and entered the main square where hundreds of red flags were hung out to welcome them. But it did not stop here, continuing its journey towards the cathedral and the memorial garden, pulling up finally in front of the Bishop's Palace.

Loudspeakers hanging from the trees in the memorial garden behind were playing Soviet partisan songs when the forty-six passengers got out, still without speaking. They had been badly shaken both by the winding roads of Transdanubia, and by their fear about what might happen to the two daring passengers who had spoken to one another in riddles. The young man with the cloth-cap and the red carnation in the button-hole said to Vida just before alighting, "Yes, perhaps you are right about the swallows."

At this everybody felt relieved, and some of the passengers even tried to laugh. The IBUSZ girl seemed to cheer up too. "Come on, comrades," she said. "There are many interesting things to see. We must be grateful to the Party, the Government and the learned archaeologists of our Peoples Republic who have been responsible for unearthing these relics from the past of a cruel, slave-trading empire."



## *Chapter II*

### *The Memorial Garden*

True to an old Hungarian custom, nobody appeared to be in a hurry to leave the bus, although the Soviet partisan songs resounded briskly across the square. One of the passengers patted the priest Nádor on the back as he went past, "Good morning, Father," he said brightly.

The mountain of flesh, as symmetrical as a round sausage, came to life only in the movement of the head as the priest turned it to acknowledge the greeting. A pair of bright, shrewd little eyes glistening behind the spectacles were all that gave Páter Nádor animation. He stared suspiciously at the reddish hair which sprouted on the balding head of the passenger who had spoken. He had noticed him vaguely in the bus, his small mouth with ironic little wrinkles around it, pale blue eyes and bushy eyebrows. He had met him somewhere before he knew, but he had thought it imprudent to strain his memory and get into conversation. The red-haired man put his hand on his shoulder and said, "Don't you remember the table in the old Óbuda inn? Where we used to drink the Zöldszilváni and discuss life?"

Páter Nádor could not get out of this. The "table" at which they had sat in this inn in 1943, the year when the Zöldszilváni vintage had been particularly good, had been connected with their "resistance" to the Germans during the Second World War. At this table they had made theoretical plans about how to save the bridges in Budapest; but chiefly they spent the time drinking the

excellent wine of Mr. Kéli the proprietor. (Anyway, the bridges were later blown up by the Germans). One of the other "resisters" had been the well-known archaeologist, Professor Vendel Ballagó, a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. This was the man.

"Of course, Professor, I am sorry I didn't recognize you. Of course, you are with us as the archaeological expert?"

The archaeologist leant over, and the long hairs of his great bushy eyebrows almost tickled the pouchy cheeks of the cleric.

"I'm not here officially," whispered Ballagó. "I have nothing to do with the régime. I'm just an ordinary tourist. I've been kicked out of the Academy of Sciences. And the Museum. Kicked out of everything, in fact."

Páter Nádor was well versed in how to behave in a Peoples Republic. It would not be wise to go on talking like this to an old "resistance" companion. His fat round face remained impassive. Only the bright little eyes twinkled. Then suddenly, "Isn't it warm!" he exclaimed, and immediately he turned his head in the other direction.

But Vendel Ballagó who had been overcome by the unnatural silence in the bus during the journey seemed most anxious to talk to an old acquaintance. He leaned further over the priest's shoulder and said loudly, "My rehabilitation is under way, you know."

The unwashed man with the untidy hair who had been so uncomfortable during the journey sitting next to the priest was about to get out of the bus, but the word "rehabilitation" pulled him up short. His only pleasure on the journey had been looking at the hips of the blonde ~~IBUSZ~~ girl who had once, he thought, smiled at him. She had, in fact, been amused because she had never in all her life seen so much human flesh compressed into a priest's cassock.

"I hope you succeed," said the priest to the professor. He tried to speak quietly, but he had a naturally strident voice.

"I've been working in a quarry for two years," said the scientist.

"That's nothing to be ashamed of," said the untidy man who now stood beside them, loudly.

By now, perhaps because the loudspeakers in the square drowned all conversation, everyone began talking at once, and the two men were able to speak more freely.

"You might think of course that I'd been in gaol," said the archaeologist.

Here the untidy young man intervened again, "Of course we do," he said loudly. "It is no more shameful today to be in gaol than to be a patient in a tubercular hospital. In both places you may die. You've got an even chance to recover, of course. And you, it appears, have recovered."

The priest wanted to escape, but all the passengers were still struggling to get out and he remained jammed in his seat, an unwilling listener, while his archaeologist friend explained to the other man that he had not been in prison, nor in an internment camp, but that he had spent two years shifting stones.

"Where?" said the other man.

"At Kaba, where I used to be a 'Lemur'."

"Lemur? What's that?" said the untidy man.

Judging by his appearance he might have been anything from a grocer's assistant to a medical student. (In fact he was a well-known Budapest lung specialist.)

The ex-member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences did not explain what the word "Lemur" meant. He merely winked knowingly, a wink implying a certain common experience, in particular of life in a Peoples Democracy, and also a promise that the meaning of the word

"Lemur" would be explained later. Vendel Ballagó was one of the best known Hungarian archaeologists, an expert on the ancient Avars and the "stag myth" which he had discovered, had its origins in Asia. But in spite of his great reputation, European as well as Hungarian, these excavations at Szombathely had been undertaken without his participation. Someone inside the old Austrian Embassy building in the Akademia Utca (which now housed the party headquarters) had evidently coveted not only his four-roomed flat in the Museum, but also his professorial post there. Accordingly he had at once been denounced for having "stolen people's property", an ikon, the "Virgin enthroned", in 1902 from the national museum of the Ukranian Soviet in Kiev. Shortly after this he was dismissed from the Museum and his name was erased from the list of members of the Academy of Sciences. He also lost his flat. Henceforth, Vendel Ballagó was regarded as a potential "enemy of the State", and neither he nor his family were safe. It was true that during the Second World War he had been to Kiev, where he had been sent by the museum. But he had never set eyes on the "Mary on the Throne", having been engaged exclusively in studying stone bas-reliefs attributed to the ancient Hungarians when they occupied Kiev. He had even made friends with Soviet archaeologists, and at one point the Germans had wanted to arrest him as a spy. But he did not join the Communist Party after the liberation, because he had seen the Red Army in action, and only wanted to leave Budapest and his country. No one was therefore really surprised at what had happened to him. After being dismissed from the Museum, he lived with his family in a suburban basement flat in Budapest, earning his living successively as pianist in a coffee bar, apprentice in a goldsmith's shop, tennis court groundsman for a big factory in "Red Csepel"; and finally, as a "Lemur" in

Kaba. He was now at last, as he had just said, to be "rehabilitated"; and the ticket granting him a place in the cultural bus clearly implied some kind of compensation for the indignities he had suffered.

The little trio of Páter Nádor, Vendel Ballagó, and the untidy doctor were the last passengers to get out of the bus.

"Yes, do tell me what 'Lemur' means," said the doctor. But Professor Ballagó merely winked at him again, as if this were a big secret.

The name of the untidy doctor was János Farkas Kis. Having had to sit the whole way on half a seat he was in a bad temper, and had been consoling himself with the pleasure he would have in the lung clinic the following day by telling his colleagues that he had for three hours sat next to the infamous priest, Páter Nádor; that he had personally, with his own body, felt the man's physical monstrosity. His irritation had begun long before the trip when he had learned that his fiancée had not been given a ticket too. The reason was undoubtedly that he came from proletarian stock, whereas her origins were bourgeois; she was a "class alien". His complexion was pale and sallow, as befitted a man whose life is spent in hospital wards in the company of tuberculars and Koch-microbes. His bitterness about life in general, was partly related to his birth and background—he was the son of a Miskolc carpenter—and it had not been improved by present-day conditions in Hungary. Both his patients and his fiancée had frequently suffered from his bad temper. He had managed somehow to remain outside the Party and yet make a living, for he was a good doctor and a well-known specialist. He intended to persuade his fiancée to enter the Party when they were married, thus ensuring their joint future while the Party was in power. Having remained outside the Party himself, he would,

in turn, be able to rescue his wife after the collapse of Communism.

"Please tell us what 'Lemur' means," he repeated.

Páter Nádor disliked equivocal words, particularly anything like this which might get them into trouble, and he almost snarled, "This is no time or place for joking."

Like a stubborn child who refuses to take no for an answer, Dr. Kis only sidled up to him closer. He even had the effrontery to pat him on the back. "Dammit all man, why shouldn't I know what 'Lemur' means?"

At this point, the archaeologist handed him a piece of paper with something written on it.

"What's that?" asked the doctor. "A poem?"

"Yes, by Goethe. The second part of Faust. But quiet! I'll explain the rest in the memorial garden, when we get to the statue of Jupiter."

Meanwhile Páter Nádor was announcing loudly, as if he were chanting the Gloria, "It's awfully hot today, isn't it?" And he trundled his great awkward body out of the cultural bus. He was not in the least interested in the remains of ancient Sabaria. He intended to stay there half an hour, so that he was seen by the passengers, and then get on with what was the serious business of the visit. His goal was not the memorial garden, but the Bishop's Palace; he wanted to talk to the Bishop of Szombathely, not to Jupiter. And he had chosen the cultural bus instead of the train, as less likely to draw attention to his visit.

Páter Nádor was now the parish priest in Tiszadaru, a village of about three thousand inhabitants. During the war, he had a small parish in the Józsefváros district of Budapest, and he had never in his life dreamt that he would ever become a politician. With his partners in the card games, the "resisters", one of whom was the Bishop's clerk, he used to go to Óbuda where the wine was good.

After the German defeat at Stalingrad, one of the actors from the National Theatre had frightened him while playing cards by saying that the Russians would soon chase the Germans out of Budapest, and then hang all the priests from the nearest lamp-posts. Through this actor, Páter Nádor prudently got into touch with the underground Communists; and not long before the Red Army besieged Budapest, he was on excellent personal terms with the little tailor's assistant who, at the liberation, changed into the uniform of a Soviet lieutenant general overnight, and immediately became the political police chief of liberated Hungary, Stalin's right-hand man, Communist hangman No. 1. This man, Gábor Péter, had given Páter Nádor secret instructions to leave Budapest at once for Kecskemét, to await there the liberating Soviet Army. This was how Páter Nádor entered politics.

Being a favourite of the Russians, he was told to organize the Smallholders Party, and he was made Minister of Education for a while. Following the first free elections in Hungary, the Páter's Party did too well, at the expense of the Communists. In the logic of things, it was again the little tailor's assistant who ordered him to destroy his own party from within. During the next elections, leaflets advertising his party were unaccountably confiscated by the Russian soldiers (the Allied Control Commission still supervised politics), which led to the simple result that everyone voted for the Communists. Páter Nádor now retired to Tiszadaru, but his conscience did not allow him much peace.

This was one of the reasons why he had applied to come with the cultural bus to Sabaria and speak to his Bishop. He knew that, as a priest, he must be careful, for the Archbishop of Hungary had now been in prison for years, the Bishop of Kalocsa had also served a term, and

two others were under house arrest. The old Bishop of Szombathely was almost certainly under police observation. When he heard the Goethe quotation Páter Nádor was appalled, and as he left the bus he felt that everyone was looking at him. People who are very fat are unaware of the effect they have on others. Páter Nádor was under the mistaken impression that everyone was looking at him because he was the well-known priest of Tiszadaru, the famous Páter, a politician as well as a priest.

A Communist state is always celebrating something. Every public occasion is an excuse for marching about with flags and music and proclaiming new victories. The latest victory was the inauguration of these cultural tours, and a curious crowd had gathered in the memorial garden to inspect the new arrivals.

"What a fat old crow!" said someone when Páter Nádor got out.

"If he comes in that bus he must be a Peace Priest."

"No, it's the Páter. Don't you recognize his fat paunch? Five years ago the papers were full of him."

Páter Nádor overheard this last sentence; he was not lacking in vanity he smiled in a friendly way and nodded to the speaker, as if acknowledging a greeting. But nobody had greeted him.

The uniformed IBUSZ girl blew her whistle and repeated the words she had carefully memorized the night before, "Comrades! We are now in the ancient capital, Sabaria. We are about to see the remains of the superstitious age, the relics of tyranny. . . ."

Professor Ballagó whispered something to Dr. Kis and the lung specialist made a sceptical grimace.

". . . Yes, Comrades," she continued "we are to see the late art of the Antonine epoch. Until now no statue of the Roman emperor who founded the colony has been



unearthed. But our archaeologists are working according to a modern method. Thanks to this, we have good reason to hope that one day the statue of the Emperor Claudius himself will be discovered. Later, as we know, the power of the people overthrew this empire based on slavery. But alas, at the same time, many works of art were destroyed. It was the Sarnates and the Markoman tribes who were responsible for overthrowing the Roman Empire."

"As the Sarnates of today have done," the archaeologist whispered in the ear of the priest.

"Ugh, I feel so ill in this heat!" groaned Páter Nádor. "I'm sure a storm's coming."

The IBUSZ lady smiled at the priest and continued.

"Progressive socialist archeological science is doing its best to bring the treasures of ancient times to light, to make our Peoples Republic even richer. We shall see today, Comrades, some very fine things. Pay particular attention to the scales of the pine cones on the sides of the pyramids. On relief No. 183. This delineation is connected with the cult of a drunken god, Dionisius, who loved the scales of pine cones. All this art will tell us, Comrades, of the darkness in which the world lived then. A darkness which remained until the spirit of free research opened the doors of thought! To Marxist Leninism and Stalinism! From today on, thanks to our Government and Party, the working masses of the country have the opportunity to see for themselves how dark was that past. Just as today a similar obscurantism makes common cause with the Vatican and the Western imperialists in an attempt to throw us back into that dark and sinister past. But we, Comrades, will defend ourselves, if necessary with our own fists. We will defend our democracy and its cultural achievements. Now line up to visit this memorial of the past."

"Balls!" murmured Ballagó to the doctor.

**"Bollocks in blood sauce."\***

Páter Nádor wanted to leave, but he knew he must first imitate the others, so he followed the instructions of the IBUSZ girl and lined up obediently.

To the strains of Ukranian partisan songs, the forty-six lucky tourists marched through an archway decorated with huge chromophotographs of Lenin and Stalin and their greatest Hungarian disciple, Rákosi, to enter the museum of Sabaria's Roman remains.

\* Translator's note : Hungarian is rich in obscenities of this kind.

## Chapter III

### Socialist Culture

The Priest entered the museum followed by the archaeologist and the doctor, who had meanwhile introduced themselves. When Professor Ballagó learnt that this untidy, ill-kempt man was a specialist in the Budapest lung clinic he took out a notebook and gave it to him.

"What is it?" said the doctor.

"Excerpts from a secret diary of one of my colleagues. A 'Lemur' too. He used to be a cabinet minister. It will perhaps answer your question. You'll see what a 'Lemur' is."

He opened it and pointed to a page, "That's about me," he said.

The doctor read : *"I shall never forget Falstaff! Winter or summer, he was always squatting on a little three-legged stool beside the engineer's instruments. I can see the engineer now peering into his instrument in the winter on the white snow-covered plains, or in summer on the vast prairies full of grasshoppers. I have seen the engineer reading out the figures and dictating them to Falstaff. Falstaff writes them all down conscientiously. In rain, snow, mud, icy frost and summer heat he writes them down. Everyone seems to be shouting, and everyone is cursing Falstaff. The engineer treats Falstaff like a dog, because he is an outcast in the Peoples Democracy. It's another way, too, of currying favour with the Party secret informers. Then I hear him cursing Falstaff. 'You*

*silly idiot! You blithering idiot! You're deliberately being absent-minded, ruining my notes. You are a saboteur. You bastard. Get out! Go home! You coward! You wretch!' Falstaff endures it all. He knows it's better to be cursed as an incompetent surveyor in Kaba than to be arrested by the secret police as the man who stole the Ukrainian ikon.*

*"But one day Falstaff rebelled. We were all tightening the wires, stretching the chains, erecting the posts, when Falstaff suddenly jumped up, kicked over his stool and shouted, 'Colleague Engineer, I'm a human being too, you know!'*

*"We were horrified, but he went on shouting. I wish the Jews and the Levites could have come and asked this demented man, 'Who are you!' And Falstaff would have replied 'I am the voice in the desert. Make way for the Americans! Make way for Free Europe!'*

*"But neither Jews nor Levites came. Nor have the Americans!"*

"Do you keep notebooks like this on you," asked Dr. Kis quietly, trying to hand the book back inconspicuously, as if he had not seen it.

"Go on reading. You needn't worry," said Dr. Ballagó reassuringly. "I'm about to be rehabilitated."

The doctor looked round cautiously, then went on reading :

*"After this Falstaff's punishment was to carry stones. The smaller ones weighed 64 lbs., the larger 96 lbs. He had to embed them in the earth when it was frozen. The labour laws of the Hungarian Peoples Republic prescribe a bonus for heavy labour, but he still received the minimum. There were two reasons for this: first, accord-*

*ing to the Peoples Constitution, human beings come first; second, he cannot protest as he is a 'Lemur'.*

*"But Falstaff is a tough chap and his will cannot be broken. Two things keep him going. Hatred and hope. He hates the non-Party member engineer even more than the Party itself. He is also convinced that the Russians will one day withdraw from Hungary. Perhaps tomorrow.*

*"This is why he keeps his bicycle. If the Red Army withdraws, train communications may stop at any moment. Then he will hurry off on his bike to his family, to Budapest, to celebrate the Reds departure and the day of freedom...."*

"A pretty piece of writing, isn't it?" said the archaeologist.

"Keep in line, Comrades! Keep together!" came the order from the IBUSZ lady.

As no one bothered to observe this, Dr. Kis stepped forward and went on reading:

*"I'll tell you who Falstaff really is. Why not? But I'm hiding this diary carefully. Until we are free no one shall ever read my notes. Falstaff has a strong body and a first-class brain. He knows languages. He is music, an ancient tomb, a poem, a bas-relief as well as a human being. That's why we call him Falstaff. Because he can eat three onions with a piece of bread and bacon. Then he is happy and sings Italian operas. I will not give his real name, I will only say that Falstaff is the greatest archaeologist of our country. I mean a 'Lemur'. A 'Lemur' is an outcast, an untouchable, who takes on the basest, most menial jobs in order to avoid prison. He carries a metal measuring tape in summer and winter. He also carried stones and posts. In short, a 'Lemur'."*

"Put it away!" said the doctor for the first time.

The Professor put the notebook in his pocket.

"I'm Falstaff," he said clicking his heels like an officer in an old Czarist regiment.

"We must keep together, Comrades," said the IBUSZ girl, seeing this isolated little group.

The other forty-two passengers of the cultural bus were marching in fours along the gravel path of the memorial gardens, towards the bust of the Roman Emperor Commodus and the big hexagon dedicated to Jupiter, as if they were on a May Day parade. Large white letters had been painted on red sheets stretched between the chestnut trees: "Hungarian Science fights the battle for peace and the Five Year Plan with archeological research".

Dr. Ballagó slipped the notebook back into his pocket, and Páter Nádor, who was walking slowly in front, murmured to himself, in preparation for his talk with the Bishop, "The healthiest drink in the world is Csopak Rizling. All the same sometimes, your Excellency, one has to swallow a little vodka too—even if it is harmful to the heart and liver. . . ."

The procession was greeted in front of the Roman emperor's bust by municipal and museum officials. Páter Nádor noticed that the three comrades on the bus whom everyone knew were party officials had joined them, including the young man with the cloth-cap and the red carnation. The officials were all in shirt sleeves, with open neck shirts, as Party etiquette prescribed for summer festivities.

A sad, grey-faced man introduced himself as Director of the local museum.

"I know that chap well," whispered the archaeologist to the doctor, "He's a plumber. I've often seen him fretting about among the pipes in the Budapest museum."

Behind the officials a large crowd had gathered under

the lime trees, mostly workers from the local factories which were closed today; they had been ordered instead to give a great welcome to the passengers on this, the inaugural cultural bus trip. Policemen in blue uniforms with sten-guns hanging from their shoulders held them back in front of the marble head of Commodus. Beside, were members of the local girls' school, together with young pioneers from Communist youth organizations, all holding little red flags. They wore red ties and were shouting, "Long live Stalin!"

The official speaker waited for the shouting, the continuous clapping and the music to stop. He occasionally clapped himself, whether in homage to Stalin or to greet the tourists, one could not tell. Meanwhile Professor Ballagó had formed an audience of his own, in the solitary person of the fat priest, whom he held by one of the buttons of his cassock. ". . . In a week and a half," he was saying, "I had dug up and carried three hundred and eleven heavy stones in the fields near Kaba. I thought my back would break. Then one day a telegram from the museum and the academy came ordering me home. Now who do you think was responsible for that, Father? What would you have said? When I got back, they muttered a few embarrassed excuses. They said I was to be rehabilitated. They were sorry about a false charge. Now why was this?"

"Long live Stalin! Long live Stalin!" chanted the schoolchildren and the young pioneers.

". . . only a week before," continued the professor, "an important Soviet archeologist from Kiev had arrived in Budapest. At a banquet given in his honour his first question was, 'Where's my old friend and colleague, Dr. Ballagó?' This was the man I had known so well in 1942 when the Germans thought I was a Russian spy. No one dared tell him at the banquet that Ballagó had stopped

being an archaeologist, that he was shifting stones as a 'Lemur' . . . So that's why I'm being rehabilitated. I've even been given an advance of two years back pay! Have you ever heard of such a thing? A back advance? I'm rolling in cash now. . . ."

"Comrades!" the voice of the ex-plumber, now the Director of the Museum, had replaced the songs and clapping. "Thanks to the wise policy of our Party and Government, I am enabled today to greet you on this cultural occasion in the name of the city of Szombathely. The Party believes it will be beneficial for the people to take their recreations in the open air, away from the inns and card-tables and drinking dens of old. From now on, the workers of our Democratic State will get away from their factories for their holidays to the fields and plains and mountains of Hungary, to a healthier life, where they can also meet workers from other towns. Not only will our people discover the beauties of nature, they will discover too, as you will today, the beauties of culture. We have indeed made great steps forward. . . ."

"Bloody fool," muttered the archaeologist to the priest.

The Director of the Museum went on to elaborate how the treasures of nature and culture, "must be mixed". "And the living symbol of this idea," he pointed to the street outside, "is the cultural bus! What an achievement this is, Comrades! I say to you that, although we are proud of the sarcophagus which we have just unearthed—a tremendous treasure with all its symbols of Bacchus—we are even more happy to state that at the corner of Haman Kato Street and Petöfi Street in our city, in that same place where two hundred and thirty-three antique clay statuettes have just been found, we have opened a new nursery for our children. . . !"

He also announced that as a proof of the superstitions in the ancient slave civilization, a bas-relief had been



found depicting a procession in honour of the Egyptian goddess Isis. This seemed to make him most indignant, he clenched his fists and shouted, "And yet in our State, where all power belongs to the people, there are still people today who form superstitious processions—another kind of procession! Isis has another name today! The Vatican!"

"Don't listen to him, Father," whispered Ballagó to the priest.

The ex-plumber finished his speech by praising Stalin and his Hungarian disciple, their great leader Rakosi. Then he started clapping, giving the impression that he was applauding his own words. Everyone else began clapping. The fat priest clapped, Dr. Ballagó clapped, and Dr. Kis, who had little reason to clap (his fiancée had been refused a ticket for the trip) clapped in unison with them all. The drummers, trumpet players and the cymbalists put down their instruments and clapped too.

At length, the grey-faced ex-plumber who knew from long experience exactly when the crowd had expressed enough gratitude to the Party and its leaders, put up his hand and the clapping stopped, as automatically as it had started. He then suggested that the visitors should go round the memorial garden and inspect the exhibits. To the strains of the famous new march about Moscow, "You beautiful, you beloved!" played by the orchestra of the security police, the Director of the Sabarian Museum and the IBUSZ girl began speaking about the individual exhibits to the passengers of the cultural bus. The natives of Szombathely, including those who had been ordered to come, and those who had come purely out of curiosity to see the "foreigners", mingled with the "foreigners".

The group went first to the remains of the great hexagon, the memorial to Jupiter, which was the principal

exhibit. The visitors had seen this before in the picture on the Vigadó Square in Budapest. It was now surrounded by red flags.

"Comrades," said the IBUSZ girl, "we are now standing before objects which prove the great cultural value of Szombathely, the glories of what was once Pannonia. On this spot where we are standing today was once the capitol. In that first century—according to how we regard time—Sabaria rivalled even Rome itself. Think of that, Comrades!" She used the familiar second person form of address to her audience, glancing from time to time at her guidebook.

The Director of the Sabarian Museum added a further word: "You will now see the remains of the divine Trinity of the Capitol. In those times this sinful and superstitious silliness was personified by Jupiter, Minerva and Juno. Today it is echoed by the Holy See and the Catholic Church. . . ."

"Here, take some cotton wool, Father," whispered Ballagó to the priest. "Stuff it in your ears."

"What a bloody fool, this ex-plumber," muttered Dr. Kis, although he, too, did not believe in God. And then, professional thought unconsciously taking possession, he added, "He looks as if he's got T.B. too."

"His name is Seromov," whispered the archaeologist.

"Whose name is Seromov," grunted the priest.

"The Soviet archaeologist to whom I owe my rehabilitation."

Páter Nádor's vast bulk seemed almost to challenge the hexagon itself. He ambled around the marble relic and tried to look interested, but he was thinking of how he could conveniently get away to lunch with the Bishop.

"Take a good look at the remains of the capitol of ancient Sabaria," continued the Director. "Hexagon means five in Greek. There are five sides, that is to

say. . . . Oh no, I beg your pardon, I have made a mistake . . .” he began counting. “One, two, three, four, oh yes I made a mistake. Hexagon means six in Greek. These beautiful, but alas ruined, remains had six sides. As you can see, an inscription in homage to Job has been carved on one side. On the other side . . . that is to say on the remaining five . . . they placed bas-reliefs in the niches. Allegorical bas-reliefs. In the first century—it depends on how you count time—from what is sometimes called from 85 to 92 A.D. the Romans were at war on the eastern and northern borders of Pannonia with the dark skinned Sarmatans. . . .”

“He’s certainly learned his lesson,” remarked the professor quietly. “He said it depends on how you count time, so that he doesn’t have to say A.D. or B.C., because he doesn’t believe in Christ. I’d like to ask him what Sarmata means. He probably thinks it’s something to eat.”

## Chapter IV

### Piroska Szabó

Among the crowd around the statue of Jupiter was a shabby old woman who wore around her neck a small golden cross on a black velvet ribbon. She clearly found Páter Nádor more interesting than the hexagon, for she stared at him and tried several times to approach him. Once, gently at his elbow she said, "*Laudetur*," but he was too wary and pretended not to hear. On the top of her grey bun of hair she wore a faded straw hat.

The Director of the Museum went on talking about the hexagon, in particular about the mutilated half-naked figures on the lower part of the frieze. "The one here is wearing a short skirt, which means he is a boy," he said. "Today girls wear trousers. In those times boys wore skirts. Well, Comrades, sartorial habits are a bit like politics. Just a question of fashion."

"He didn't learn *that* from Lenin," said the archaeologist smiling at the priest.

"Take a good look at that Roman youth, Comrades," the Director went on. "He is in almost a squatting position, like a goalkeeper in football today, when someone is about to shoot. Look at his feet! He has the same superb muscles as a really first-class centre-forward."

"That boy was never a football player," a high-pitched voice in the crowd announced. Everyone looked round and saw it was the old woman, who was half hidden behind Páter Nádor's cassock.

Her remark had no immediate effect upon the specta-

tors, but it seemed to break some kind of spell. The order and discipline were not quite the same as before. Several people began talking among themselves, although the fair-headed IBUSZ girl was now holding forth near the bust of Commodus. The Professor of archaeology turned to the priest, "If you like, Father, I'll show you where the ancient basilica of Quirinus stood."

Páter Nádor was prepared to accompany him, as the Bishop's Palace was only a short distance away, and he hoped to slip away unobserved, while pretending to examine the site of the basilica.

Dr. Kis was meanwhile in two minds about what to do. Should he go to the head of Commodus, where the pretty little Cicerone was still talking to the tourists? Or should he follow the priest and the "Lemur" to the basilica? He remembered his fiancée, Viola, and decided on the basilica. He was not alone, for the little old woman, as if still attracted by the huge bulk of the priest, followed them reverently.

The Professor became enthusiastic when he found himself again on his own subject, and he began discoursing learnedly. This had an immediate effect on the others. Someone who understood the subject was now talking. Some of them knew that this man with the red cheeks was a greater expert on Roman remains than any of the officials. Now that he knew he was to be "rehabilitated", he did not much mind what he said, and he spoke quite freely. The words which for years had been bottled up inside him while he carried stones in the fields at Kaba came pouring out. The shabby little old woman stood beside them, drinking it all in.

Like all archaeologists he had something of the poet in him, something of the musician too. In his youth he had read all Mallarmé's poetry, and he loved the music of Bartók (now condemned as "incomprehensible"). He

spoke of things which had taken place here in the first century B.C., and he frequently pronounced the name of Christ.

In the distance the words of the MBUSZ girl could be heard. She was talking about the Roman stone bowls, filled with fruit, between two panthers in a pediment. "Comrades, let us carefully inspect the statuesque figures of these sea monsters swimming in opposite directions on the column with intertwined bodies. . . ."

"I used to be a schoolboy here," said the professor. "I collected coloured stones. I brought bits of pavement mosaics from the Quirinus basilica home."

"Look at that!" cried the old woman, suddenly pointing to the statue of Jupiter.

The archaeologist interrupted his learned exposition, and everyone stared at the marble stone. The old woman took hold of the priest's cassock and pulled it in her excitement. "You see? There it is. *I see it!*"

"What do you see?" said the archaeologist severely.

"A young man on a large white rock."

"Where?"

"There, pointing towards the cathedral. Below the cross. Don't you see?"

"The hexagon?"

"Look, you can see his head. It's not a football player at all, as that man said." She glanced towards the officials.

"Whom do you see then," asked Dr. Kis boldly.

"Who, my dear, who else but St. Martin!"

The doctor ran his fingers through his hair and laughed aloud. This was the laugh which was much disliked in the hospital wards, and which frightened his patients. Perhaps this was why he laughed again, this time nervously, "Go home, Auntie," he said "and have a good rest."

"But I see him. Look! That's no statue of Jupiter. It's the statue of St. Martin. Of course it's St. Martin. He was born here. In Szombathely!"

The doctor continued to treat this lightly. The subject was too dangerous.

"St. Martin's season will come in November," he said. "That's the time for ghosts."

"Yes, perhaps then too. Only a minute ago, I saw him, his whole figure and head. Now he has disappeared. But he promised to come back. Yes, perhaps he'll come back in November."

"You have a chat with St. Martin now and then, do you, Auntie?"

"Yes. One evening he said to me, 'Well, Piroska, I shall see you next in Sabaria when we will demolish the pagan altars of the Devil. Just as I did once in Gaul.'"

At this the archaeologist became interested, "Where do you say he demolished them?"

"In Gaul, he said," she replied.

The archaeologist would have asked more but, for some reason, the words stuck in his throat. It was just as well, for at this moment, from behind Páter Nádor, a grim-faced man with an authoritative manner appeared. "Follow me at once!" he said as he gripped the old woman's arm. Everyone was dumbfounded. Within a matter of seconds, the crowd which was gathered around them had disappeared. Some wandered away, as if unaware that anything had happened. Others, who were more timid, and in spite of making it seem obvious, took to their heels as if they had the Devil after them.

The man who had arrested the old woman was evidently a plain clothes political policeman, the ordinary type, always to be found hanging about, on the trams, in the streets, wherever the public gathered, to hear what they were talking about.

"Don't squeeze my arm so tight!" cried the old woman.

At the back of the group three men were standing watching, the three passengers from the cultural bus who had been greeted so ceremoniously at the Red Star Hotel in Veszprém. The man in the cloth-cap, whose expression had caused such apprehension in the bus, was fingering the red carnation in his button-hole. He stood a little apart; but another man, whom they had all imagined was the representative of the IBUSZ, stepped smartly forward and began giving instructions.

"As quiet as possible, Comrade Szopor, please. Let the people disperse. And bring these three along too." He pointed at the archaeologist, the man who, thanks to a Soviet scientist, was soon to be rehabilitated! He then put his hand on the arm of Dr. Kis, as if to see what sort of material his suit was made of.

"You, too."

"Where?"

"Don't be frightened. We only want to question you. As a witness."

Meanwhile the grim faced man who had made the arrest was looking, mesmerized, at the fat belly of Páter Nádor. The faded shabby cassock was stretched like a balloon over his stomach, wrinkled and creased only at the button-holes. "Father, yes you'd better come along too."

Páter Nádor nearly said, "But I'm expected at the Bishop's." On second thoughts he nodded obediently, whilst saying a quick silent prayer.

A small group formed and they moved towards the exit, passing on the way the little IBUSZ girl who was still explaining before a Roman tombstone that the deceased, whose memory was honoured with this stone, was according to the epitaph, "As brave as the gods themselves,



wiser than all mankind, and his steed faster than the storms. . . .”

Everyone turned at this point as Comrade Szopor showed the way out of the garden to the small group consisting of the priest, the archaeologist, the doctor and the unfortunate old woman. They were followed, at a distance, by the drummer of the Ávo orchestra who now had, instead of his drum, a sten-gun over his shoulders.

The busz girl stopped talking, aware perhaps what this all implied, and everyone turned to look at the strange little procession. It left in complete silence. It was as if the memorial garden, with all its music and shouting, had suddenly become a graveyard.

## *Chapter V*

### *Interrogation*

They could have left through the back door of the memorial gardens leading into Sorhaz Street, but Comrade Szopor took them to the main entrance under the red flags and notices announcing the services rendered by Culture and Archaeology to the Five Year Plan. They followed the Vár path which led past Páter Nádor's secret destination, the Bishop's Palace, and went on past the Fire Station to the Police Constabulary, whose portals were guarded by men with sten-guns. Comrade Szopor stopped to slip a note into the hand of one of these, and the Ávo drummer took charge of the little party. He immediately gave Professor Ballagó a sharp dig in the ribs with the butt of his sten-gun. "Get a move on," he said coarsely.

Comrade Szopor must have seen this because, when he rejoined them, he made a sibylline but clearly admonitory remark to the drummer. "Codliver oil," he said.

Whatever this peculiar phrase meant, the result was that the drummer became politer, and at the junction of Kiskar and Vorosilov Streets he even offered Páter Nádor a cigarette. The priest thanked him, but did not accept it; instead, he lit one of his own. The policeman still held Piroska's arm in a grip of iron, and from time to time she winced. In Borostyánkő Street her hatpin ornamented with a small silver butterfly fell out of her hat. "Oh, my little butterfly!" she cried. Dr. Kis picked

it up and would have handed it back to her, but Comrade Szopor confiscated it. "We can't have her opening her veins," he said, and he put it in his pocket.

Borostyánkő Street with its famous Bishop's Palace had once been the link between Sabaria and Italy. Its reputation now rested on another building, bigger than the Bishop's Palace, the secret police headquarters guarded night and day by the blue Ávo posted before the iron gates. These gates had swallowed up hundreds of people who had secreted Western currency, or who had had some connection with the Western powers and the Vatican. They had been brought here by the blue or green Ávo, having been caught perhaps while trying to leave the country, trapped in the barbed wire or set upon by police dogs.

Páter Nádor had learnt all about this from the ex-tailor's assistant who now ran the secret police. He knew it was the task of the Ávo to keep the gaols and internment camps well filled. In accordance with the rules of the Five Year Plan, the Ávo had to fulfil their "norms" like any other department of State; the number of prisoners they held was laid down in advance. They must have their own plan for Szombathely, he reflected, as they went down Borostyánkő Street; there must always be a certain number of "Fascists" awaiting trial. And he realized that the silly little frightened old woman, whose words about St. Martin were responsible for all this, must have been exactly the type of person they were always looking for. He was extremely annoyed with her. As the result of her chatter, he would be late for the excellent luncheon which awaited him at the Bishop's Palace. "Holy stupidity," he muttered, thereby unconsciously modifying the words of John Huss, *sancta simplicitas*, pronounced three hundred years before at the stake in Constance.

Beside him walked Professor Ballagó whose face had gone pale, and who nervously plucked at his bushy eyebrows. For years now, since he had been dismissed from the Academy for his remarks about "Mary on the Throne of Kief", he dreaded having anything to do with the secret police. Now it had happened. Even if only as a witness, he was now in their hands. He knew that he had not yet been *fully* rehabilitated, he was still a "Lemur" to them. He cursed himself, too, for having the diary in his pocket. The thought of Comrade Szopor reading it made him shudder.

"Where are we going, honoured Comrade," he said at length.

"You'll soon see," said Comrade Szopor. There was no sympathy in his voice.

Dr. Kis was annoyed too. Why on earth hadn't he joined the other group and listened to the *IBUSZ* girl? But he assured himself, there could be nothing to fear. They couldn't possibly do anything to someone who had, quite by chance, found himself listening to the rubbish uttered by a stupid old woman. His working-class origins, his important work for the new People's Democracy in the tubercular ward of the hospital, must safeguard him against any possible dangers.

The little party turned at the corner of the square and found themselves in front of the huge new building which housed the ÁVO. It was built in the same style as the labourers' hostels, one wing with three floors, the other with six, depending it seemed on the size of the windows, some of which were tiny and barred like dungeon cells; others had window boxes of geraniums. On top were mysterious bulky concrete shelters. Like Sztalinváros, the new steel town which had sprung up from nothing on the Danube, this type of building was the pride of the new society.

The iron grille leading into the garden was open, but a fair-haired youth in the uniform of the blue Ávo was on guard. The importance of his work and of the new rules of military service (which emanated from Moscow) was emphasized by the quantity of arms he carried; a Russian style rifle with a short bayonet over his shoulder, a sten-gun in his hand, and a revolver in a leather holster at his side.

In front of this building was a well laid out garden, its lawn decorated and watered by an automatic rotary device, once used in Hungary only in private sanatoriums for the privileged rich. This gave the air a fresh tang, full of the ozone associated with the mountains near the Austrian border. A rainbow shimmered in the air above the falling spray.

In front of this watering machine the old lady suddenly stopped. "Why have you brought me here, Comrade?" she asked.

Instead of answering, the grey-faced Szopor took a key from his pocket which he put into the lock. It was evidently not an ordinary lock for the whole wall started to tremble as he turned the key, and a quiet rumbling, as of a distant earthquake, could be heard. Comrade Szopor invited them all to step in with him; and when the little party was inside, the invisible wheel started turning again, the subterranean rumbling was repeated, and the great handleless door swung to behind them. Péter Nádor and his new friends had vanished inside this vast building like so many Jonahs in the belly of the whale. (Stanislavskij, the famous Russian stage manager it is said, used to surprise his audiences by similar theatrical devices.)

Comrade Szopor now let go the old lady's arm and smiled for the first time. He belonged to that class of person who smiles once per year, generally on the anniversary of the Russian revolution. "Forgive me, my

good lady," he said, "for holding you rather tightly. But I did it for your own sake. Many of these people were very annoyed with you for your remarks about St. Martin."

"But what harm did they do to anyone, Comrade," she asked.

"You wounded public opinion. You should be glad I arrived in time. Otherwise," he looked at the back of her head, "they might have torn down that pretty little bun of hair."

The old lady, like little Red Riding Hood when she met the wolf, looked pathetically around for help. She looked first at the priest, but Páter Nádor turned his head away.

"Comrade," she said to Szopor in a small voice, "give me back my little butterfly, please."

They were in a well-polished corridor where everything was clean and new, and where the smell of mortar and paint had not yet been supplanted by other, cruder smells. They were aware too of the aroma of freshly ground coffee, revealing that here, in this Holy of Holies, the leaders at least could obtain that delectable grain largely unknown in the rest of Hungary since the war. Symmetrical white doors were repeated on both sides of the corridor and a heavy silence, as of patients awaiting a doctor's interview, hung over all. The whole atmosphere reminded Dr. Kis of a select and well-equipped hospital.

Comrade Szopor pushed a button, one of the white doors opened, and they went inside. The door evidently operated on the same system as that of the wall through which they had entered the building, because it then closed automatically behind them. The one window in the room had gay flowered curtains, and it looked out on to a garden panorama, including the green trees of the memorial garden and the twin towers of the cathed-

ral. It was a soothing spectacle, enhanced by the rainbow still shimmering above the elaborate watering machine.

"Please take a seat, gentlemen."

The Ávo man did not say "comrades". Perhaps he wanted the witnesses to know in advance that he would not trust them.

A writing desk stood on one side of the room; beside it was a cupboard with open doors and a number of files on the shelves. Newspapers, books and files lay scattered on the desk, in front of which were comfortable arm-chairs.

Comrade Szopor, whose expression had resumed its normal gravity, now pushed another button on the wall, and some neon tubes hanging from the ceiling flickered into life, giving the room a sickly greenish-yellowish tint. Dr. Kis was about to ask why electric light was needed on a sunny afternoon in June, when Szopor pushed another button. The floor on which they stood began to vibrate, and then slowly to sink like a lift. The cathedral and the rainbow seen through the window slowly disappeared from view and, for some minutes it seemed, they went down and down. The old lady cried fearfully, "Dear Lord! Where are you taking us?", but the three men kept silent.

After a series of jolts the room came to a standstill. Through the window one could now see a long corridor full of artificial lighting, intended evidently to resemble sunsets in the early summer on the Lake of Balaton.

Comrade Szopor pushed another button on his desk and the door of the room opened. He left them saying, "I must ask you to have a little patience, I shan't be away for long."

When they were alone, Péter Nádor said bitterly to the little old woman, "Did you really have to talk like that about St. Martin? What's your name?" The un-

pleasant predicament as much as the yellow neon lighting gave all their faces a pallid, melancholy appearance.

These harsh words from a priest hurt the old woman more than her arm, still aching from the vice-like grip of Comrade Szophor.

"I am Piroska Szabó of Dimitrov Street. A seamstress."

"Well you certainly know how to chatter."

"Please, Father, I did not know I was giving anything away. When I set eyes on that wonderful young man, our dear St. Martin, I could not control myself. . . ."

"Cut all the crap cackle!" snapped the doctor, deliberately using Budapest teddy-boy jargon, with which he had often made his patients at the clinic wince.

Professor Ballagó was annoyed too. He got up from the armchair and paced about the room. In front of the wretched woman he shook his fist, admonishing her with the same bitterness he had shown a Royal Engineer in the fields near Kaba. "You religious maniacs get a lot of people besides yourselves into trouble," he said. "A farmyard hen knows more about life than you, you half-wit. You blithering idiot! You . . . you you. . . ." He choked with emotion, looking for further epithets. "Do you know what you are, you old bitch, you. . . ."

Páter Nádor took his breviary from his pocket and began muttering to himself. "I've had enough of these holy old sows and their hallucinations. In Tiszadaru there's one who goes on the lake alone in a rowing boat every week, under the impression that she's accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel."

"Please, Father, don't say such things," begged Piroska. "Every word is overheard here. That's why the Comrade left us alone, to find out what we're talking about."

The untidy doctor thumped his fist on his knee. "By jove she's right," he said. "Be careful."

"Yes, ssh," whispered Professor Ballagó, his frightened



face turning—if such a thing were possible—a shade more green.

They now sat in complete silence, glancing from time to time with distaste at one another's faces. Páter Nádor rummaged in an interior pocket secreted somewhere near his stomach, and pulled out a pair of thick rimmed spectacles. He put them on and began reading his tattered black leather-bound *Pars Aestiva*, on the page where he opened it at random. He murmured gently the words, "*At humanum genus cum natura beatis illis mentibus inferius sit*".

"We aren't in church now, Father," said the doctor. "We're at police headquarters. Giving evidence is not confessing at High Mass. Would you mind stopping these unnecessary lamentations. Why should we all get into more trouble because of your bloody prayers?"

Páter Nádor changed his spectacles; he put on his long-sighted ones and stared, as if with interest, at the doctor for some time. Then he changed them again and continued his recitations, "*Omni vi studioque contendit, ut quod fieri potest, illas sequatur. Quomodo?*"

The doctor sighed, as if resigned to everyone else's stupidity and attempted to feel at ease, taking up a magazine lying on the table, as he might have in a dentist's waiting room. "My God," he cried. "Look, it's an American magazine."

His surprise was genuine, for at this time in Hungary no one in his senses dared speak of America, let alone read its publications. The north American continent was tacitly supposed to have sunk beneath the waves.

At this point the door opened and Szopor came back. The doctor quickly replaced the American magazine on the table.

"Go on reading," said Szopor. "That's what it's for." He turned to Piroška and asked her to come with him

into the other room, where "her personal data" would be recorded.

The little old woman with the grey pigeon face obediently followed him, not without giving an appealing look at the priest as she went out. But he was deeply absorbed in his breviary. It was clear that he intended to show he had never set eyes on the woman before.

Time passed.

The priest remained immersed in his text while the archaeologist glared sullenly at nothing. Both chain smoked the popular "Kossuth" brand of pungent cigarette. The doctor, who didn't smoke, picked up the American magazine again and remarked that the Moscow University Faculty of Medicine had accepted the Canadian statistics that 99 per cent of pulmonary cancer deaths were due to smoking.

"I can't believe it," whispered Professor Ballagó in spite of himself. "These percentages always remind me of a victory at the polls."

Páter Nádor glanced at him disapprovingly, whereupon the scientist quickly corrected himself, adding that he was naturally referring to polling victories in the days of Hitler's Germany. "Anyway," he could not help adding quietly, "there are perhaps worse diseases than cancer of the lung. If we were to be kept here for ever, for instance."

"Please stop making silly jokes," snapped the doctor.

Although he knew a little English, he had done all he could to forget it since that day not long after the war when the Party chief in the hospital introduced the system of questionnaires. One of the questions was, "Which foreign languages do you know?" He always wrote "Russian", although he knew not a word of it.

"These ~~read~~ Americans eat peaches in sandwiches," he announced loudly.

He was reading an appetising advertisement for canned food produced by a Pittsburgh firm, when the priest said softly, "*Non nubunt Angeli; at neque etiam virgo.*"

To which the doctor, also reciting what he read, replied with a marked Miskolc pronunciation, "See what you can do with hot peaches and hamburgers."

At this point there was a sound of groaning outside, and they all started, turning to the windows. In the artificial light of the corridor, they suddenly had a fleeting glimpse of a completely naked old man stumbling past. It lasted only a second. The man came and went. Alone. Groaning and stumbling. They stared at one another, and a horrified expression came into the three faces which were already pallid in the neon lighting.

The subterranean rumblings which always accompanied the opening and closing of the only door in the room began again, and a waiter in a white coat wheeled in a trolley with food on it. Rarities unobtainable in Hungary lay before them, butter, ham, sausages. Dr. Kis tried to talk to the waiter whose sleek black hair reminded him of an Italian filmstar; but the man would not answer. He poured them out coffee from a "nationalized" silver coffee pot. Engraved on it was the ancient name of the local inn "The Crown Hotel", together with the Hungarian royal coat of arms, and St. Stephen's crown. He then left them as softly and silently as he had entered. Only the rumble of the door machinery announced that he had gone. The doctor did not take the food, but began sipping his coffee nervously. The archaeologist whose greenish pallor betrayed his lack of appetite more than that of any of the others refused to eat or drink anything. He said he was feeling sick and wanted to go to the lavatory. But the fat priest who could never resist food, drew up his chair and was soon tucking in.

As the minutes passed the silence was only broken by

the ticking of a clock. But there was no clock in the room.

Páter Nádor dropped his breviary on his knees as he ate, and took out a polka-dotted handkerchief with which he began mopping the sweat on his fat round face. The archaeologist sat beside him motionless, his body bent as if over some unknown tragedy; only the little whimpering noises which escaped him from time to time showed he was alive. Perhaps they indicated his concern about the diary in his pocket, perhaps his desire to go to the lavatory. He had, no doubt, uttered exactly the same sounds when made to carry stones for the Kaba engineering project. The doctor meanwhile sat nervously tapping his fingers on his knees; he poured himself out some more coffee from the silver Crown Hotel pot, his hand shaking as he did so. His trembling fingers recalled that first Jacobeus operation which he had performed in Budapest, when he had made a technical error and thrust his scalpel into the wrong part of the patient.

The door opened again, this time causing the whole room to shudder even more than it had before; and a number of people came in. In front, her eyes lowered to the ground, as if she had come from Holy Communion, walked Piroska Szabó. She sat obediently in one of the armchairs which Comrade Szopor pulled up in front of the writing desk. His face was still as expressionless as the tombstone above the grave of Sextus Celer in the memorial garden, decorated by dolphins and the head of Medusa.

He sat at the desk, flanked on either side by two of the new arrivals, who were equipped with those special notebooks produced *en masse* by the Party to "meet the increase in output", to take the hearings at Party seminars and police interrogations. They made themselves comfortable and got out their pencils, whose points they

examined with the critical detachment of clerks who think that sharpness of a pencil is all that matters in the world. There was a fourth man, a plump fellow with a peasant's moustache, partly bald, and with a deep cleft between his eyes due to some peculiar bone deficiency in his forehead. This gave him the perpetual expression of being half asleep. He withdrew surreptitiously to the farthest corner of the room, near the window through which the rays of the artificial sunset on the Lake Balaton were still falling.

In the heavy silence which fell, Szopor pushed a button on the writing desk, "Vaszilij please," he said, and the white-coated waiter immediately entered again to take the trolley of food away. As the door closed Comrade Szopor asked the priest, the doctor, the archaeologist to pull up their arm-chairs. He spoke quietly but curtly, and they obeyed him automatically. The hearing had not yet started, but they were already behaving like well-drilled Communist automata.

## PART II



## *Chapter I*

### *The Polka-dotted blue material*

"We will start with the interrogation of Piroška Szabó, unmarried seamstress, engaged at present in the private sector of industry," said Comrade Szopor. "I must request the close attention of the witnesses who have been so kind as to attend. We asked you to come not only to confirm what you heard with your own ears in the memorial garden, but also to give your personal opinion. The People's State appreciates the private opinions of others when they are based on goodwill. Comrade Sztalin laid down that, according to the tenets of Leninism, in the class warfare being waged today we must get to know our enemies. Please do not misunderstand me, Comrades," he used the word Comrades deliberately now, instead of "gentlemen", perhaps to indicate that, in his eyes, there was only one enemy present in the room—Piroška Szabó, "seamstress engaged in the private sector of industry."

He then spoke at length about the close observation under which they had been keeping this woman for some time. She was known to speak openly to everyone about St. Martin and her admiration for him to all her customers and to the children in Dimitrov Street.

"We reached the limit of our patience today, and we must now render her harmless. She is a notable example of the enemy within, conspiring with the Holy See and



their treacherous priests. Their aim is to sow the seeds of conspiracy by seemingly harmless remarks, thereby achieving the restoration in Hungary of the great land-owners and the priests. This kind of interior enemy is the most insidious of all. One of their methods when questioned is to pretend to be insane. We have just explained to her that this will not save her. On the contrary it can only do her more harm. It is therefore in your own interests, Piroska Szabó, to tell us everything. Do you understand?"

"I understand perfectly," said Piroska, half in a whisper.

"Speak up."

She obediently repeated, "Yes please, I understand," but this time in an even lower tone of voice.

Her change of manner since they had been waiting in this room was remarkable. She no longer made little whining noises about the loss of her silver butterfly brooch. Nor did she look pleadingly at Páter Nádor, nor complain that her arm had been hurt in the grasp of Comrade Szopor. All apprehension and uncertainty seemed to have vanished. Although she could hardly be pleased with her situation, the only "class enemy" in the room, she seemed calmer and more self-assured than the others, who were inwardly quaking. It was she rather than they who seemed to be a happy visitor in the "cultural bus", who had come to Szombathely to "drop in on old friends". All this unpleasantness about St. Martin, she seemed to say to them all as well as to herself, was of small importance. Soon she would be allowed to go home.

"In the presence of the three witnesses," Comrade Szopor continued, "I will take your personal particulars again and compare them with the previous ones. Your name is Piroska Szabó. Your mother's name, Gizella Tollas. When were you born?"

"On the 11th November 1903. On St. Martin's Day."

"Do you attach any importance to the fact you were born on St. Martin's Day?"

"I see in it the grace of God. He allowed me to see the light of day when the whole world was celebrating the anniversary of St. Martin."

"Come, come, the whole world? Only a small, a very tiny fraction of it."

"That tiny fraction is my whole world," answered Piroska. Her new courage amazed the witnesses.

The two stenographers sitting beside Comrade Szopor wrote continuously, occasionally looking up at the old lady; but if they had any feelings by no show of emotion or expression did they betray them. They were model bureaucrats, such as are to be found the whole world over; they could easily have belonged to the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy, intent only on the letter of the law.

In the corner, the mysterious man with the cleft forehead appeared increasingly bored.

"I can only commend you for your clever answers, Piroska Szabó," said Szopor. "Would you like some cherries?"

"Yes please."

Szopor gave orders into a little box which stood on the table in front of him beside the telephone (it looked like a birdcage—but where was the budgerigar?). "Vaszilij please, a plate of cherries!"

There was a silence for some moments. Then the well-dressed waiter who looked like the Italian film star came in again through the automatic door, with a trolley bearing a large plate of red cherries.

"Thank you very much," Piroska Szabó smiled, revealing cheap shining false teeth. She began eating the

cherries, spitting the stones into her palms. She didn't know where to put them, and scattered them liberally under the desk of Comrade Szopor.

"To continue, Piroska Szabó. We have agreed that you were born on St. Martin's Day."

"Yes," answered Piroska, still eating cherries. "The good French people celebrate their victory over the pagan enemies on that day. Because dear St. Martin helped them. He told me."

"Do you speak French?"

"No."

"Well then, in what language did St. Martin speak to you over all these years?"

"In the language of the spirit. The universal language."

"Please explain yourself."

"St. Martin spoke to me in whatever language he spoke. I only know I understand him all right in Hungarian."

"Good. We will grant you that, Piroska Szabó. Now answer another question, please. What caused the death of your father?"

"The Devil."

"The Devil?"

"Yes, the Devil had got hold of father and persuaded him to drink away every penny he had in the bars and pubs. One evening he threw himself off a bridge in the Perint river."

"In a word, your father was an alcoholic. When did he kill himself?"

"Oh, that happened back in the days of Franz Joseph. In the days when there were no bread coupons and no democracy. I was a schoolgirl then and we lived, not in Dimitrov Street, but in Nefelets Street."

"Where is that?"

"The street called today Dimitrov Street. In those days

it was called Nefelejcs Street. Because in those days there was no Dimitrov."

"That is irrelevant. You lost your father when you were a child and lived with your widowed mother?"

"Yes, but the two of us lived together in the greatest harmony."

"She brought you up?"

"Yes, my mother was a seamstress too. And she taught me how to sew. I went to the Catholic school where the reverend fathers taught me. And for two years I went to the grammar school."

"So you were four years in the priests' school for elementary education. Then two years at the grammar school. You were only twelve years old when you finished school. That's pretty early."

"I could not continue schooling, Comrade, because my mother was often ill with terrible back-aches. I had to help her in the household. With the washing, the cleaning and the cooking. As well as with the sewing. You men have no idea how much work there is to do in a household. . . ."

"All right, all right, Piroska Szabó. We don't want your views on what we know—or what we don't know. We know perfectly well that there are many things to do in a household. We appreciate the importance of household work, although it hardly increases Socialist production. Now answer another question. What did the priests teach you?"

"They taught me to read and write. I learnt how the world was created. And what is the purpose of life. They also taught me not to steal what belongs to others. Nor to tell lies."

"Did they tell you about St. Martin?"

"No. Nobody taught me about him. Only my sewing-machine."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, one evening as I was sewing my sewing-machine started to talk."

"So it was a sewing-machine which told you about St. Martin then?"

"No, not exactly, Comrade. It was St. Martin himself who told me."

"Through the sewing-machine?"

"Yes."

Szopor glanced to right and left, to ensure that the stenographers were noting every word. When he saw that they were scribbling away industriously he looked towards the comrade with the cleft in his forehead who was sitting near the window in the corner. The man made a small inclination with his head which might have meant anything, and Szopor continued. "How long have you been living alone in Dimitrov Street? That is to say, when did you lose your mother?"

"In the year when the Red Army liberated us. God rest her poor soul. She was so depressed by what she saw, and what happened, that she lost heart altogether. She didn't even live till Whitsuntide."

"What happened to you that year?"

"The same thing that happened to all our females, whether they were fifteen or eighty. The Russian soldiers took us to peel potatoes."\*

"I have to warn you, Piroska Szabó, not to make slanderous remarks about our liberators. You should rather be grateful to them."

"I cannot be grateful. With hands and feet and nails I tried to escape from the potatoe peeling. But three of them got hold of me. It was a miracle that I somehow managed to preserve my virginity."

\* Translator's note: The phrase to "peel - potatoes" was an euphemism in those days for "to be raped".

"Perhaps St. Martin intervened on your behalf," said Szopor ironically.

"That is very possible, Comrade."

The man in the corner at last spoke, instructing the two stenographers in a hoarse, rasping voice, "Don't fail to note every word of that nonsense, Comrades."

The two Comrade stenographers looked up, nodded obediently, and went on scribbling.

"So you've been living here alone since 1905, earning your living by sewing. For whom are you working at present?"

"For nice kind private people who like my work."

"For women?"

"For men too."

"Tell us who."

"Well, for instance, last autumn I made a double-lined winter coat for His Excellency the Bishop. There had been rumours that he was about to be arrested, so I went to his palace, took his measurements and made him a winter coat. To prevent him from freezing in gaol, of course."

"What did he pay you?"

"I only accepted the cost of the material. I gave the work for nothing. In the name of St. Martin."

"But the Bishop was not arrested?"

"Well, he's not allowed out of his Palace. For weeks he hasn't been able to go over to the Cathedral to say Mass. But why do you ask me that, Comrade?" There was genuine surprise in her voice, "You ought to know all about that better than I do. Why are you afraid to let His Excellency the Bishop out in the open?"

Szopor's manner became even more frigid, and he refused to look at her. Instead, he asked another question.

"Since when has your machine been telling you these stories?"

"It was in the year when it was officially forbidden to slaughter pigs. The authorities told us to eat only rabbits. But only once a month. I can't remember when that was."

"The new decree for the deliveries of fixed quotas of agricultural products and livestock was issued in 1909. Together with the decree restricting the activities of the Kulaks. So it was then that St. Martin spoke to you first? In 1909?"

"Yes, one evening in November. St. Martin's Day. His own day. It was my birthday too."

"Since that day then, for the last three years St. Martin has been regularly telling you stories?"

"That is incorrect, Comrade. Dear good St. Martin spoke to me only three times."

"We want to know more precisely about this, Piroska Szabó. Are you sure that St. Martin spoke only three times to you?"

"I'm absolutely sure. As sure as I am that we are not in the bell tower of a church at this moment. But in a basement."

"When was the first time?"

"Well, as you have calculated, Comrade, it must have been in November . . . I was sewing up a polka-dotted dress for myself. It was the dress of my poor mother who was fatter than me. And I was altering it. I was too poor to buy a new one. It was then that dear St. Martin spoke to me first."

"Don't speak so fast. We want you to tell us everything in detail. We're interested in all your problems. What sort of material was your mother's polka-dotted dress made of?"

"Well, I can tell you one thing. It wasn't that wretched People's fabric which is useless and turns into cobweb in six months. It was the good old-fashioned stuff. *Batiste* they call it, I believe. From the Óbuda factory."

"When did St. Martin speak to you the second time?"

"It was while I was sewing a party dress for Comrade Kukorica's wife. A kind woman." A human look of surprise flitted for a moment across the expressionless face of her interrogator.

"So you worked for the wife of Comrade Kukorica too, did you?"

"Yes, for that one party dress. Two years ago. They call it a cocktail dress today, I believe. You know, with wide sleeves, and short skirt. In shiny silvery material. I replaced the seams with hook and eye fasteners. We had some discussion about that I can tell you, because at the neck. . . ."

"All right, all right, Piroska Szabó. Spare us the details. We know nothing of dress-making here."

"Well, a few minutes ago you told me to give you all the details! I'm telling you about the dress I was making when the machine started to talk."

"Yes then, all right. Let's hear it."

"Well, Comrade Kukorica's wife hesitated right up until the last moment. It was all about her neck, as I was saying. You see, her neck is already like a capon's. You know, full of sinews and veins. So I told her to wear a small purple scarf. That's the Paris fashion now."

"Paris fashion! How did you find out about Paris fashions?"

"Well, my mother had an old friend in Warsaw who was devoted to her. He'd been a prisoner of war here in the first world war. Although he was a Pole, you see, the Czar had put him in the Russian Army. Now, it was he who sent me *Mode Parisienne*. But I don't get it any more. Perhaps he's died in Warsaw. Or perhaps the paper's confiscated at the frontier. It always used to arrive punctually. Every month, from Warsaw."



"So you have been receiving regularly a Paris fashion magazine through Warsaw?"

"Is that a crime, Comrade?" She now seemed frightened, and added that she was the only woman in Szombathely who had any idea of Paris fashions. That was why Comrade Kukorica's wife came to her. She had ordered the cocktail dress for the anniversary of the great October revolution two years ago."

"So you admit, Piroska Szabó, that you were working from a Western fashion magazine, which had been smuggled in? Did the President of the county, Comrade Kukorica, know this?"

"I did not say that, Comrade," she protested. "Only his wife knew. Anyway I was not making a cocktail dress for the Comrade President of the county. I was doing it for his wife, who paid me very fairly. She gave me fifty forints more than we had agreed. Do you know what she said, 'Here, Piroska, fifty forints more. You've made me a very pretty party dress'."

"What is the total sum the wife of Comrade Kukorica paid you?"

Behind clouds of smoke the Comrade near the window with the cleft forehead made a gesture with his big fat hands, "We needn't pry into that, Comrade Szopor."

"All right, Piroska Szabó. You answered my question about the second time St. Martin spoke to you very well. It was in the autumn of 1950 when you were sewing a cocktail dress. It doesn't matter for whom."

"But of course it's important, Comrade. Because Comrade Kukorica's wife finally got a moiré collar instead of a scarf. She insisted on it. She didn't want to conceal her anything. She thinks she has got a pretty neck and décoltage."

"And the third time St. Martin spoke to you?"

"A year ago."

"St. Martin evidently speaks to you once a year? Was this also in the autumn?"

"No, in the late summer. The chestnuts were still green in the road on the Gyöngyöspart embankment."

"That was when you made the winter coat for the Bishop."

"Yes."

"This too followed Paris fashions?"

"Please don't laugh at me, Comrade. His Excellency the Bishop was not about to go to a party, but to gaol. And for those who are going to gaol in the winter, the Paris or Moscow fashion is the same. Fortunately, thanks to dear St. Martin, he did not have to go to gaol."

"Was it then that the Bishop said to you, 'Piroska, one day St. Martin will liberate Hungary'?"

"His Excellency never said anything of the kind to me."

"But you have admitted it. These two comrades here," he indicated the stenographers, and then the man in the corner, "and even Comrade Penyige heard your words."

"They misunderstood me."

"But there is no misunderstanding. The witnesses heard it too. You confessed to having prayed together with the Bishop to St. Martin to send his angels who will liberate Hungary from the rule of the People's Democracy."

Comrade Penyige in the corner made a gesture and pronounced again the sybilline word they had heard before they had entered the prison, "Codliver oil."

Comrade Szopor immediately changed his tone of voice. "Some more cherries, Piroska. And give some to the Father."

"Thank you very much, I don't want any," said Páter Nádor dryly.

"So we can be clear on this," continued Szopor. "The sewing-machine spoke three times. The first, on the 11th November, 1949, when you were altering your mother's polka-dotted dress for yourself. The second time, when you were sewing the cocktail dress with the special collar. The third time at the end of last summer, when you were making the winter coat for the Bishop. Before you tell us in detail what St. Martin said to you, please tell us what it feels like when a machine starts talking and telling you stories."

"It is very exciting."

"How does it happen? How does the voice come out of the machine? Are you sure it wasn't the wireless?"

"I was sewing away, thinking of my poor old mother. I even envied her in some ways for being dead. No more illness or troubles. No more taxes. It was just then that the men were digging up the memorial garden. As you know, it was said there were some of St. Martin's relics there. And I was thinking that perhaps my mother might meet St. Martin in heaven."

"Before that, you hadn't even heard of St. Martin?"

"Of course I had. He was born here, in our town. The street now called Sztalin Street was St. Martin Street. I also heard that he was a very modest man. He hid himself in a goose cage at the time of the bishop's election because he didn't want to be a bishop. That's why everyone eats goose in Szombathely on St. Martin's Day. At least, that's what they used to eat when there were geese to eat."

"We shall have geese again soon, Piroska, more plentiful than before, rest assured. But first, we have to fulfil the Five Year Plan. Now answer my question. When did you first ask the Bishop about St. Martin?"

"I didn't ask him. I knew that St. Martin was a very

great man. He was a saint. Everybody is proud of their home town and they don't forget it even in heaven. And specially when one's a saint. I know that dear good St. Martin does not forget us. He will never forget his native town, Szombathely."

"That's enough about St. Martin, and where he may be now. Nor are we interested in whether your mother will meet him in heaven or not. What is important is what happens here on earth. Tell us more about the sewing-machine."

"The sewing-machine rattled away while I was working. It is worked by a foot pedal. Sometimes I stopped and listened to the rain which was dripping from the roof. I was alone. I went on pedalling. Then all at once, I clearly heard the voice of a man. It was like the voice of a dear old friend over the telephone. But he did not say, 'Who is speaking?' The voice seemed to be coming from far away. It was so funny because I could not see the man who spoke, just as you can't see the person when you are on the telephone. The needle jumped up and down as I pedalled and the voice said, 'Don't worry, Piroska. Your mother is in a happy place. I spoke to her not long ago. And she told me that you started wearing glasses at the age of six'."

"What happened then?"

"Well, I was so astonished I dropped the *baliste* dress with the polka-dots. I stopped sewing. Then the voice stopped too. I heard only the rain dripping from the roof outside. I looked round the room to see if somebody was playing a joke. But there was no one there. I was quite alone. I thought how stupid one can be sometimes, imagining things. So I went on sewing. Then at the very moment when I started pedalling again, the voice started again. It said, 'It is me, Martin, who conquered the great evil in Gaul. I know that pagans now

rule my beautiful Fatherland and that you all suffer greatly. But be patient. One day, I shall return to Hungary and conquer the great evil there too.' Then I asked him how he had conquered the evil. But he did not answer—because I was not pedalling and the machine had stopped. When the needle started to go up and down again dear St. Martin said, 'Can you hear me, Piroska. It is I, Martin, speaking to you. All my life I have been fighting demons. Some have mouths reaching to their tails. And horrible smells came out of them. . . .'

"Now keep to the main lines, Piroska Szabó," interrupted Szopor. "You can add all these details when we come to your hearing."

The three witnesses glanced at each other, shocked to learn that the hearing had not even started. They had supposed that they were in the middle of it.

"When shall I be able to get away to the Bishop's for lunch?" mused Páter Nádor sadly. In his depression his fat face seemed to have sagged. It looked like a sack full of grated cheese hung up on a hook to dry in his larder at Tiszadaru. Nor was he more pleased when Comrade Szopor turned and addressed him, "Father József Nádor, you were born in Bácsalmás on the 4th April, were you not?"

"Yes, in 1896."

"The name of your mother was Júlia Kele?"

The priest nodded.

"Last summer," continued Szopor looking at his files, "on the 16th June 1951 you were in Debrecen when you visited the picture gallery in the Museum Déry?"

"Yes I was there," said the fat priest, "but I don't remember the date."

"Thank you. And now you, Professor Ballagó," he looked at his papers again. "Keeper of the museum and ex-professor. You were also a member of the Academy

of Science. Are you still working in Kaba for the State surveying organization?"

The archaeologist nodded.

"Thank you very much. I have no further questions for you at the moment. However, I would like to ask Dr. Kis one small question. You are assistant university professor and lung specialist I see. What is the origin of your name Farkas? Your second name?"

The doctor's face went pale. This was not a question he liked. "That is my name. Patients call me that. I am known by it in the Budapest medical and scientific world. I write articles and theses under it."

"Forgive me, I do not wish to ask disagreeable questions nor to embarrass you in any way. But according to the official entries on your birth certificate which comes from Miskolc you were simply called János Kis. Were you by any chance christened twice? If so, perhaps that is how Farkas was added?"

The doctor was annoyed and ran his fingers through his disorderly hair. "No, I was not christened twice. I have two christian names, like Goethe. With the difference, that he was not Farkas János but János Farkas.\* Comrade," he continued angrily jumping up from his chair. "the name of Farkas was given me at the University because there were so many other János Kis's there. You can call me what you like in your minutes. I couldn't care less. But I should like to get out of here as soon as possible. I didn't come to Szombathely to sit about in your mysterious castle." He raised his voice higher and higher as he spoke, until he was almost shouting. Páter Nádor disapproved of such excessive self-confidence; taking out his breviary, he began reading it again. Professor Ballagó gingerly put his hand in his pocket to feel if the secret diary was still there.

\* Johan Wolfgang Goethe, not Wolfgang Johan Goethe.

"You will be entered as Dr. János Farkas Kis in the minutes," said Comrade Szopor coldly. "But one more question. Is it true that your fiancée is Viola Reiner? And your father-in-law to be, Dr. Alfonz Reiner, owner of several houses and sites under the Fascist régime." He read, "A sanatorium owner . . . a property speculator? Furthermore, this is the Dr. Alfonz Reiner who was expelled from Budapest for good. He appears to have been on the board of the horsehair manufacturing company. And of the Rickett's Blue Firm too. As well as being one of the main shareholders in the Lipótmező Mental Hospital? A doctor, I see, he calls himself, although as far as I know neither horsehair nor Ricketts Blue has anything to do with curing the sick. Is that so?" The question was spat out venomously.

Dr. Kis answered guiltily, "It is so."

At this point, Comrade Szopor made some notes himself. He indicated that the doctor should sit down. Then he announced that, although Piroska Szabó had been invited several times to enter either the Socialist Trade Union of Seamstresses or the Flóra Martos Co-operative Society, she had refused. She had even stated openly that she "refused to enter a Bolshevik kolkhoz." She had stubbornly preferred to go on working in the private sector. He would admit, however, that she was an excellent worker. She sewed and mended, altering other people's clothes, from morn till night. You could see her every hour of the day as you passed along Dimitrov Street sitting at her machine by the window. She had no previous convictions and until now had not been in any sort of trouble, either in the People's Democracy or under the old régime.

"And now, tell us please, Piroska Szabó, what else did St. Martin say to you when you were altering the blue polka-dotted dress?"

## *Based on the minutes of the Hearing*

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you. All my life I have been fighting demons. Some had mouths reaching to their tails. And horrible smells came out of them. Among them was a beautiful young man with a bird's wing where there should have been an ear. Some of them had red eyes which lit up like lamps in the night. They were sent to me by the evillest of all evil beings, the Prince of the Night. Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you.

"Sometimes it was the philistine with whom I crossed my sword. 'Beware of the dogs,' can be read on the door of every rich man's home. A rich man even has the place which houses his own soul guarded by dogs. So you, Piroska, beware of dogs! Drink coffee instead. Beware even of your own dogs! The unhappiest people of all are those whose houses are guarded by dogs. For the dogs are the playmates of the devil. He plays with them and they do not tear him to pieces.

"I had a dream, Piroska. In it, the Lord came to me in the image of a ragged beggar and said, 'You are still only preparing yourself, Martin. You should be ashamed of yourself, you unstable *Kathie*.\* Can you hear me, Piroska? Is it I, Martin, who is speaking to you. The Lord said to me in my dream, 'Go back to your own country Martin.' And that is how I came back to Sabaria. I was no longer a *Kathie*. I had no idea what hardships awaited me in this, my native town, beside the little Perint river. I did not then know that it is not only our souls which the demons wish to possess, but they also hope to destroy our bodies. For

\* In his terminology this represents those who were not convinced of the Christian religion.



the Prince of Night hates all things created by the Lord.

"Just as the lightning strikes first a lonely man running for safety from the storm across the fields, so the Prince of Darkness and his demons attack first, and most fiercely, those who are lonely and isolated. When there are many people gathered together, the demons are usually content with making them fight one another. When they see many people in conflict they are happy and burst into peals of laughter. As they did in Jerusalem long ago. And in Babylon. At such times the dogs, too, are happy. They shake their chains and bite those who come to them through the door. Then suddenly the Prince of Night appears and destroys all. So it was when Babylon was destroyed. So it was when Jerusalem was destroyed. So it was when Sabaria was destroyed. So it will be when this modern Szombathely is destroyed—if you do not drive away the demons.

"But I, Martin, will help you, Piroska. Do not fear. I remember that I came back on my horse from far-away Gaul, back to my native town, where I found a festival going on in honour of the goddess with the cow head. The ladies-in-waiting of this goddess were dancing before an altar half-naked, wearing silver shoes. This so distressed me that, when I saw my mother and my father in the procession, I put spurs to my horse and galloped away. And behind them I saw dancing gaily the beautiful young man wearing a feathered headdress. But one could not see his ears, or rather what should have been his ears, for he had a bird's wing in the place of an ear. I stopped to water my horse in the River Perint and found myself weeping. And I was accosted by the goddess's lady-in-waiting, Anne, who said, 'Why are you weeping poor fellow?'

And she took hold of my hand. As she did so sparks flew from her fingertips.

“‘Begone,’ I cried, ‘you devil’s handmaid.’

“A Green Bird was sitting on the back of my horse and when, at my words, she left me, the bird, too, flew away. Then the other lady-in-waiting to the goddess with the cow head, called Charlotte, appeared beside the river. Apart from a small lace apron she was completely naked. When I saw this I began praying earnestly, whereupon Charlotte’s hair caught fire and out of her mouth foamed black saliva. My horse neighed, turned its head up towards me and spat in my eyes.

“When I arrived home, I found a huge reception in progress, at which my father was wearing the insignia of the American Legion, drinking the sweet wine of Dozmat, and playing dice with his soldiers. I reproached him for these sins, and that he slept with Anne and Charlotte. I said that in these modern times even the Roman Emperor believes in the Christian God. I implored him to accept our Lord. Two of his soldiers then fell on their knees before me and said they believed in the Christian God. One of them rose and threw my father’s idols from the window.

“My mother then came to me, and cursed me. ‘Why have you returned home, to make the last days of our life unbearable?’ she said.

“And all this time the Green Bird was sitting on the window-sill.

“My father then attacked me, striking me with all his power. But I caught hold of him and threw him down. At that moment I would gladly have cut off his head.

“The beautiful young man with the bird’s wing where there should have been an ear stood behind me

too. 'Plunge it in his heart,' he said, 'the sword kills best in the heart.' I recognized his evil and would not do the deed.

" 'Be calm my son,' said my mother, 'are you still not aware that this girl is made for you? We have asked you to take her in marriage.' When I saw that Anne stood behind me I ran crying from the room. I ran along Borostyánkő Street, and to all I met on the way I said that I alone knew the cure for death. Whereupon certain bystanders asked me riddles.

" 'If the father has a beard and the son has one, are the two beards alike?'

"I then knew that the philistine were governing Sabaria. And it was these ordinary people, these bystanders who tolerated it, who allowed a pagan procession to be held in honour of the goddess with the head of a cow. I cursed them for their stupidity, and everywhere I went I heard angry dogs barking at the doors. I knew now that I was among the millions of demons of the invisible world, that I was in the hands of the philistine. Since the world began, there have always been a hundred-fold more evil demons whether or not they are invisible than honest people.

"I now found that my hands and feet were tied, and that I had been taken by the banks of the River Perint. There I heard the voice of the Beautiful Young Man with the wings instead of the ears, 'Punish him!' he cried savagely.

"Then I was beaten. With sticks and ropes and rods. And then, when my bones were breaking, when my skin was peeling from my body, they left me to drag myself home.

"On the threshold of my family home I fell down, and my mother took me in her arms and wept. 'I saw you, my son, on the banks of the Perint. Like the "Man

of Galilee" in Jerusalem, you were whipped with iron rods and chains. And now I tell you that I, too, believe in Him.' And so, as I lay half-conscious on the threshold of the house I was born in, my mother entered into the Christian faith. But my father would not change his belief. He picked up the household gods that I had thrown down, and placed them again above the hearth. He remained always a pagan, dedicated to the power of evil.

"The next morning the philistine led me to the city boundaries and told me to turn and run towards the West, towards Oliadi. And to remind me of what I had heard, they tore off my beard and moustache. My sin was that I had told the truth.

"Yet I do not know of what heavenly material the beard is made. All I know is that the father and the son have the same beard. It is a real beard, not as beards are today, made of cotton. And as I ran the Green Bird followed me until I had left the country.

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you."

\* \* \*

"You told that excellently, Piroska Szabó," said Comrade Szopor, when she had finished. "A splendid tale."

"But this is not a tale, Comrade," she protested. "Every single word is true."

"And now we'll ask the witnesses what they think about it all. Please, Father," Szopor turned to Páter Nádor, "let's hear what you have to say."

Páter Nádor had been thinking all the time during this extraordinary confession how he could most easily get away to lunch with the Bishop. He felt as if he had inadvertently trodden in some excrement in the street, and he ought to clean his shoes. But he had nothing to

clean them with. "It's all a stupid nursery tale," he said, and then, turning to Piroška, "Why do you make us waste our time like this? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

She was appalled by his attack and her face, sickly in the artificial lighting, became even more grey and miserable. A tear rolled down her cheek behind the cheap metal spectacles. "How can you speak like that, dear Father," she said. "When even His Excellency the Bishop has admitted that I have talked to dear St. Martin. Do you know what he said? He said, 'Well, Piroška, it may well be that you heard all this'."

At this point Penyige in the corner intervened. "Put that down immediately, Comrade," he said to the stenographer. "The witnesses have heard that remark. They will have to testify to it later with their signature. The Bishop and the seamstress conspired together. They both believe in St. Martin and the sewing-machine."

"The stenographers note down every single word, Comrade," said Szopor.

Comrade Penyige, a broad grin on his face, squeezed his hands together in delight. "The Chief will like that bit," he said. He did not add who "the Chief" was, nor whether this mysterious figure was here, in Budapest, or even in Hungary.

Páter Nádor looked down glumly. On his face was the same distressed expression with which he had watched the Soviet soldiers when they had confiscated the election leaflets and destroyed his Democratic Smallholders Party at the last election. He turned angrily again to the old woman, "And now you even connect your ridiculous nursery tale with His Excellency the Bishop. I have never in all my life heard such impudence." He spoke loudly and authoritatively, as he did when he had wanted to make a point in Parliament.

"Please keep calm, Father," said Szopor. "You will need all your wits about you during the interrogation."

Piroska Szabó's eyes looked pathetically from one face to the other, seeking support of some kind. She had hoped for help, at least from the priest, but she saw only the pale faces made more yellow and hostile by the artificial lighting.

At this point Dr. Kis jumped up angrily and shouted, "This is really too much." But Professor Ballagó smiled, "A psychiatrist, it seems, is needed here," he said, "not a lung specialist."

"I must ask the witnesses not to talk to one another," said Szopor. "Sit down, Comrade Doctor. We have not yet completed the interrogation of Páter Nádor. Please be calmer. Father, will you continue?"

"I have said all I have to say," said the priest.

"No, I think you still have something to add. This is not an ordinary case which occurs every day. It is a matter of great importance for the security of our society and country. Why do you suppose we are using two stenographers?"

The priest nodded.

"You heard that too, did you not, Comrade Doctor and Comrade Land Surveyor?"

The two other witnesses also nodded.

Szopor continued severely. "As Piroska Szabó revealed a few minutes ago, we see that His Excellency the Bishop clearly has a different opinion about the tale of the sewing-machine from that of the parish priest, József Nádor. I would like you therefore to amplify a little, Father, please."

"Well, gentlemen," said the priest, "I doubt if it proves anything—what this half-witted female says about His Excellency the Bishop. I should say it is just about as authentic as her story that she and St. Martin drank

coffee together. By the way, did coffee exist in Hungary in those days?"

Here the archaeologist Ballagó intervened. "Coffee was known in the Near East as early as the fifteenth century. But in Europe only in the seventeenth century. St. Martin lived in the fourth century, so that every word she says is unfounded on fact."

"I did not ask you to speak yet, Comrade Ballagó," said Szopor. "I know you are an excellent scholar and scientist. Please continue, Father."

"In my opinion," said the priest, "the whole thing is the muddle-headed invention of a mad woman. We priests know all about such people. We have plenty of 'miracles' to deal with. The buffetings of life distort weak minds, and this explains why hagiographical rubbish of this kind is always one of our problems."

"So you consider this all hagiographical rubbish? Yet we heard only a few moments ago that the Bishop of Szombathely himself encouraged Piroska Szabó in this 'hagiographical rubbish'. What then, may I ask, is the reason for it all? Perhaps we should ask the Holy See, or the Western imperialists, or America, in the name of St. Martin to overthrow the Hungarian People's Republic. But I'm afraid you will not succeed, Father Nádor. We are vigilant."

The cunning little eyes of the priest blinked behind his glasses. Then suddenly he counter-attacked. "I really do protest most strongly that you include me in this word 'you'. Do you count me among the enemies of my country?"

Comrade Szopor retracted. "I didn't mean you personally, but the Catholic clergy as a whole. Particularly the leaders who conspired to destroy our society. And who now are serving their well deserved sentences. Cardinal Mindszenty above all. And the criminal Bishop of Kal-

ocsa. And of course many other bishops who follow their lead."

"I know none of these men personally."

"But we do. Will you tell me why you consider the story which we have just heard 'hagiographical rubbish'!"

"It has a serpentine quality. It is empty morphology."

"Is this theological language?"

"Such rubbish has nothing whatsoever to do with theology. I am convinced that His Excellency the Bishop could have paid no attention to such twaddle."

Piroska who was listening closely almost shrieked, "Why do you go on torturing me, Father?"

Páter Nádor only scolded the old woman. "You're talking a lot of nonsense, Piroska. Moreover you're lying. You put all the blame for the behaviour of the philistine and the *Kathies* on His Excellency the Bishop. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're committing blasphemy, too. You have dared to make fun of the beard of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"I had no intention of doing such a thing, Father."

"Well you talk about Jerusalem as if it was any . . . any . . . Western city. New York. Paris. You insult the Holy City where our Lord preached, suffered and was crucified. You ought to undergo some form of penance."

"Must I confess to this sin?"

"Of course."

Szopor interrupted them severely. "We're not in a Catholic confessional, my friends," he said. "We are in the offices of the Hungarian State Security Department."

But Páter Nádor was so annoyed that he ignored him. A large throbbing red vein swelled on his fat forehead, and he waved his hands threateningly at Piroska. "Sew a dress for yourself in coloured violet next time! And do your penance in it," he said.



Silence fell, broken only from time to time by the sobs of the old woman.

"Let us summarize what the parish priest, József Nádor, has just said," said Szopor. "Hagiographical nonsense, blasphemy, lies, a serpentine quality. Now it's your turn, Professor Ballagó. Perhaps you will place your extensive historical knowledge at our disposal. Tell us what you feel about what you have just heard."

"My rehabilitation is on its way," said the archaeologist offensively. "In the Museum. And in the Academy."

"We know all about that. That is why we pay such attention to what you have to say. Do you consider that Piroska Szabó's story has any historical or archaeological foundation?"

"No, it's complete fiction."

"Would it be accepted by advanced science? She talks about the needle jumping up and down in the sewing-machine which speaks? And about the voice of a person who is long dead."

"It is quite unacceptable."

"Is it possible to arrive at any conclusions from this story?"

"No, I find the whole thing laughable. The wretched woman talks of the American Legion. At that time America was not discovered!"

"Personally, I don't find that very laughable, Comrade Ballagó. She spoke of American legions, because she and the Bishop are apparently awaiting the arrival of the American troops."

"Yes, but I shouldn't take all that too literally."

"You as an archaeologist know what the excavations mean in this town. You applied for the cultural bus excursion, no doubt to examine them. Is it true that the statue of Jupiter is not Jupiter, but St. Martin?"

"Not at all. That is nonsense."

"And do you consider as nonsense too that His Excellency the Bishop encourages the members of his congregation to ask St. Martin's help against us?"

"I know nothing of that."

"Well we've heard. . . . Furthermore we. . . ."

"We will disregard that for the time being, Comrade Szopor," interrupted Penyige who was still sitting in the corner.

"Please tell me, Professor Ballagó, do you find the smallest grain of truth in Piroška Szabó's story? Does it in any way tally with historical truth?"

"Yes, one incident does."

"Which incident?"

Professor Ballagó tried, for some reason, to be funny. "Well dirty girls weren't ashamed even in those days to show their pretty little tummies covered with only a—what did she say?—a lace apron. I expect it was just as much fun in the fourth century as it is today."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Now I have a few questions for you, Dr. Kis."

The doctor got up. He preferred standing, not so much out of respect for his interrogators as because he could talk more authoritatively. He ran his fingers through his untidy hair.

"From the point of view of advanced medical science," said Szopor, "is it possible that a sewing-machine could talk?"

"No, it is not at all possible." (We should not forget that this habit of repeating the words of the question is a fundamental part of the Party Seminary Convention.)

The doctor now considered he was on his own ground, and he expatiated grandly and self-confidently. "But there

are some people whose eighth cerebral nerve pair, the *nervus acusticus*, does not function in the normal way. In some cases, small earbones behind the eardrum perform the necessary compulsive or forced oscillation where there is some external sound stimulus to precipitate the process. The elastic pelical of what is called the labyrinth is also affected by this compulsive oscillation. Are you with me?" He saw some mystification on his interrogator's face. But Szopor nodded as if he understood everything.

The doctor continued. "This pathological phenomenon is the result of the abnormal sensitivity of the *nervus acusticus*. From a medical point of view this is the very essence of hallucination. On that basis alone, I find the story of the talking sewing-machine, from the point of view of progressive medical science, acceptable in so far as a person whose eighth cerebral nerve pair does not function normally might suppose he or she heard another voice while listening to the rattling of the sewing-machine. That is to say, in other words, that for such a person an external sound stimulus would transform, beyond the ear drums into the voice of an imaginary or visionary human being whose identity is such that great mental pressure is borne on the imagination of the said person."

"Hallucination is then a sort of mental disease?"

"I should say rather it is a frequent symptom of several mental diseases."

"Would you agree then that Piroška Szabó is insane?"

"I would not make that precise allegation. My special field, as you know, is not psychiatry but pulmonary diseases."

"Of course, that is an entirely different matter. Thank you anyway for your most illuminating evidence. Please be seated, Comrade Doctor."

Dr. Kis, as is so often the case with small-minded and

vain people, was delighted with his technical display. He sat down in a glow of self-satisfaction.

But then he thought of something and got up again. "I would like to make one proposal, Comrade," he added. "Call for the ambulance to take this female to the asylum for a proper examination. Why are you crying," he suddenly turned to Piroska Szabó. "There's nothing wrong in that. Having your brain tested doesn't hurt. Anyway, not all mental diseases are incurable."

## *Chapter II*

### *The Shiny Silver Party Dress*

Comrade Szopor tried to reassure the old woman, "Don't cry, Piroska Szabó," he said. "No one is going to harm you."

But the tears poured down her face, making it look even more emaciated and insignificant. Her back was bent as it was when she laboured at home in Dimitrov Street over her sewing-machine. The little lace trimmed hat she clutched was soaked with tears. "Why do you say that, all three of you?" she sobbed. "It's not only slander. You insult my soul. You are perjurers! Oh please, Comrade," she turned to Szopor, "please save me!"

"You'd better look into your own soul," said the priest bitterly. "You'd be even more horrified by what you saw there."

"I've told you once that we're not in church," interrupted Szopor. "Stop talking about souls." At this point he addressed the small inter-communication box on his desk. "Refreshments, please!"

The smart waiter Vaszilij again appeared with his trolley, this time packed with bottles and glasses. The silver ice pail of the former Crown Hotel of Szombathely was filled with ice cubes. In the old days, when the gipsy musicians played their sad Hungarian airs for the gentry at the Crown, the champagne was cooled in this pail.

Today, here below ground level, it was used for other purposes. "What sort of drink would you like," said Szopor. "Orange? Lemon? Raspberry?"

For more than ten years Piroska Szabó hadn't seen a lemon, so that now like a child who sees a new toy she stopped crying, smiled and automatically stretched her arm out for one of these forgotten fruits. "Yes, please, I'd love that," she whimpered.

The waiter cut a lemon in two and squeezed it into the glass professionally. Piroska Szabó almost snatched it and emptied the glass at a gulp.

Páter Nádor said he would prefer raspberry. While Professor Ballagó's eyes lit up when he saw a bottle with the label "Bikaver—Ager", one of the most famous wines of Hungary. The waiter obligingly opened it and offered him a glass. Meanwhile, Dr. Kis was fascinated by a small flask filled with yellow powder bearing an English label, "Instant Breakfast Drink. More vitamin C and A". It amused him to think that this powder must have come from a confiscated gift parcel which had been sent by relations in the West. "I'd like some of that," he said, and he added bravely, "After all, not everything from the West is poison, is it?"

Comrade Penyige who was chain-smoking by the window asked for a cup of black coffee. Comrade Szopor drank a glass of soda water. No refreshment was offered to the two slaves, the stenographers.

"Now, Piroska Szabó," said Szopor in his kindest tone of voice, "I see you're calmer. Don't take any notice of the three witnesses if you think they're unfair. They want to get you into trouble in order to save their Bishop. But they won't succeed. Rely on me for that."

This tart remark caused the expression on the faces of the witnesses, who had been visibly enjoying their refreshments, to change to apprehension. Dr. Ballagó sud-

denly found the famous Bikaver bitter; and Páter Nádor held out his glass at arm's length as if suddenly wanting no more.

While this refreshment was being absorbed, the mysterious waiter remained in the room sitting on a chair behind the witnesses. His cold, Creol face with slanting oriental eyes revealed no emotion. What he felt, what he thought, what he even understood of the Hungarian language they were all speaking, was a mystery.

"Ah, you've pulled yourself together I can see, Piroska Szabó. As I say, don't be frightened of the witnesses. You can say what you like about their statements."

"They have attacked me most unfairly, most unjustly, Comrade," she said quietly. "Because I told the truth. Not only did I hear him, I also saw him."

"Whom are you referring to now? Whom did you see and hear?"

"The young man with the ears like bird's wings. And the house where St. Martin was born. It is not, as people suppose, behind the Stalinallee in Szentmarton. It is in Operint Street, not far from the chemist's."

Dr. Kis now felt that he should again make a favourable impression with another show of technical knowledge. "One symptom of the mental trouble I have referred to," he intervened, "manifests itself in hallucinations, in visions. The *bulbus oculi* then works abnormally. The retina is one of our most sensitive organs, as you know, and it is affected by the disturbance of the eighth nerve pair. Do you follow me, Comrade?"

Szopor made a gesture with his arm indicating that he would prefer no further comment from the medical profession. "Please do not insult Piroska Szabó, Doctor," he said. "Have you no manners?"

The doctor jumped up indignantly. "But I . . ." he began.

The archaeologist tugged his coat from behind, he suddenly stopped and sat down, a sullen look on his face. Obsessed with his own knowledge, he had been unaware of something which was becoming increasingly clear to the others as the hearing went on. *That the seamstress should be treated as a mental case did not fit into the plan of the investigation.*

"So you assert you saw St. Martin as well as heard him," said Szopor.

"Yes I saw him too."

"What does he look like?"

"Oh, beautiful!"

"And did he have a proper beard, or one made of cotton?"

"He hadn't a beard. He had a nice, clean, smooth face, well shaved, like that of His Excellency the Bishop. As a matter of fact, I should say that when the Bishop was a young man he must have looked very like St. Martin."

Here Comrade Penyige interrupted hoarsely from the corner where he sat in a cloud of tobacco smoke, "See that is included in the minutes!"

Páter Nádor was now gazing raptly up at the ceiling and the lights and he whispered audibly, "The saintly idiot!"

"I assure you, Piroska Szabó," said Szopor, "we will defend you against insults from these witnesses. Tell us now, in the same clear articulate way, as you told your first story, what happened when you were sewing the cocktail dress made of the shiny silvery material."

"For the wife of Comrade Kukorica?" said Piroska.

"Yes, you may have as many oranges and lemons as you want. But speak frankly and fearlessly."

Yes, said the old lady, she would like some more lemonade. Then she began again.

"It was late at night, I remember. I was busy with the



dress that evening until midnight. The wife of Comrade Kukorica had asked me to be quick with it. It was in my interests too that it should be a success, she said. She would pay me well. And to be honest, Comrades, I live in a very modest way, you know. I'm very poor. But although I don't ask for very much, I do like a bit of bacon spiced with paprika now and again. Now that everyone has been declared a *kulak*, and is put in gaol if he salts his own pig, bacon has become a rarity. And then we don't see any butter because the milk is taken from the peasants when the fixed quota of agricultural products is collected. Sometimes, they even collect more milk than the cow produces. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Piroška. You shall have some fresh milk and butter."

"I won't say no to that, Comrade. Honestly I won't. I'm really beginning to feel quite hungry."

"Go on with your story, Piroška. As we Hungarians say in our proverb, 'Let our lips imitate our minds'. Say exactly what you feel."

"Well," continued Piroška, "the wife of Comrade Kukorica was kind enough to allow me to help myself whenever I liked to her bacon with paprika, as well as to her bread and butter. Once she even offered me some Russian caviar. I'd never in my life eaten caviar. Honestly, it was delicious. I told her that the population was starving and the people's shop in the Martirok Utca distributed bacon only once a week, mixed of course with sunflower oil. She tried to do her best. She is a kind-hearted woman, you know, not like her husband, the President of the Council. 'Well, Piroška,' she said, 'we must all have patience. Soon the Russians will leave our land, and then we shall have plenty of everything again. We must never forget that they have liberated us from the capitalist yoke. That is why we must show our grati-

tude in the only possible way. By feeding them.' You know, Comrade, it is very unusual for a poor seamstress like myself to eat Russian caviar!"

"Please come to the point, Piroska. What did the sewing-machine say to you?"

"The hambones," the old lady went on, ignoring him, "which are confiscated are generally taken to the President of the Council's larder, where. . . ."

Penyige in the corner now became indignant. "Enough of these hambones," he said, "tell us more about St. Martin."

Piroska Szabó turned indignantly to him. "The comrade sitting there at the desk gave me full permission to talk about everything," she said. "I will therefore state that the wife of Comrade Kukorica assured me that when the Five Year Plan is completed, and the reparation for the war damages are paid, by giving our food to the Russians, we shall have beef again. 'Until that time, we must learn,' she said, 'what starvation means. That is what the Russians say.' Furthermore the wife of Comrade Kukorica said, 'But you, Piroska, will not starve, I will see to that. If you do your best for my dress. . . .' And then suddenly St. Martin started talking to me again through the sewing-machine. . . ."

*Based on the Minutes of the Hearing*

"Can you hear me, Piroska. It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you. I did not bathe in the River Perint with the beautiful Anne.

"You are now about to sew a dress for the girl servant of the goddess with the cow's head. You have forgotten that you are working for the devil. In Gaul I fought a hundred battles against him, demolished hundreds of his altars, for he does not deceive me, even with his hundred different faces. Each time I recog-

nized him and I always know that he is the Prince of Darkness. Sometimes he comes to me with a human face, sometimes wearing the skin of an animal. I have even known him to appear before me as a corpse.

"On the occasion I have spoken of, he made the people gather round a tomb, and he encouraged them to pray for a dead man's salvation. The people all believed that the bones of a martyr were in the tomb. But I had already learnt the truth from my guardian angel. He told me that the Devil had placed the bones in the tomb, so that his myrmidons should feed on them. They were not the bones of a martyr; they were the bones of a murderer, whose evil soul, I knew had gone to hell to escape me. He had the horns of an ox. On the very day on which I saw this, three dumb people suddenly began to talk, and the pagan altars collapsed.

"I was followed everywhere by the Prince's servants, and wherever I went the Green Bird observed my every movement.

"The soul of that murderer came back to me from hell that night and tried to destroy me. I knew it, because that very evening the stove in my room suddenly burst into flames. I tried to escape, but I found that the door was closed, for the Devil had locked me in. And so that night he nearly had his way and destroyed me. I was nearly burnt alive. So frightened was I, as the flames played around me, that I started praying. Fanned by the early morning breezes, they licked my face and body and then, when I started to pray, they went out. And with them, at the same moment, I heard the soul of the murderer fleeing from the house.

"Then I saw the Devil again in the body of an ox in Gaul, where he tried to butt one of the coachmen of our monastery to death.

"I also met him as a cow, with a grinning demon on his back. And I shouted, 'Leave the poor animal alone.' It fled at my words. That day my servant milked the cow, which all at once became amenable as it stood in its shed.

"On another occasion, I saw a huge rock in the courtyard of our Bishop's residence on which, one afternoon, two demons were perched. They persuaded one of my priests to attack me, and thus, by killing me, to obtain the Bishop's seat for themselves. Such power had they over him that he started stabbing me with a dagger. But I chased the two demons out of the courtyard and they fled, wailing. It was then that the priest who had wanted to kill me kissed my legs.

"Can you hear me, Piroska? These are all the things that I have done against the Devil. I, St. Martin, fought him alone.

"The Emperor's lieutenant was a man called Salfa, who did not want to hear the Christian truth. To this pagan I said, 'You are death itself, Salfa. The voice of the Devil prevents you from hearing the violins of the angels.'

"One of the lieutenant's servants who had been attacked by the Black Death, was lying on his deathbed. Salfa told me that he would believe in Christianity if I could save this dying man. I therefore drove the demon out of his body. Salfa immediately became a Christian. These were the things I did in Paris during the great plague of the Black Death.

"Then the demons of the Prince invented and propagated a disease which is known today as Spanish Flu.

"Later, the Prince visited me, impersonating Salfa himself. He even had the impudence to wear a diamond crown and golden shoes. And he told me that he was Jesus Christ. To which I replied in anger, 'You

have never suffered in the way that human beings suffer. Show me your wounds.'

"He fled howling.

"On another occasion, he appeared before me as Venus. Again I drove him out; this time he left behind him an evil smell which I shall never forget.

"A hundred times he plagued me with these tricks, appearing in all the guises of all the false gods. And each time I drove him from my house. After this he left me for a while and tried to convert many good people in both Pannonia and Gaul to his faith, by impersonating men of learning and science.

"Beware always, Piroška, those who talk of the sciences and praise Nature rather than God.

"I travelled all over Gaul mounted on an ass, and preached sermons against him to the pagans. I threw down his altars wherever I found them, and demolished all his temples. Such was my faith that I have even moved rocks he had placed in the way of honest people; and for this I used only a straw.

"In the city of Anboise on the River Loire in Gaul, he had erected a huge white tower to demonstrate his power. I asked his lieutenant to order his soldiers to pull it down. They tried, but they failed. Nor could my own servants remove it. Then one night, when I had been praying hard for many hours, a vast storm, with lightning, struck the tower. It fell in pieces.

"That, Piroška, is how I fought the Devil in Gaul.

"In Aquitania people said that a huge rock represented Jupiter's head. It was the same here; we could not destroy this pagan idol, although my servants used the heaviest hammers and mallets they could find. The Devil was hiding there in the heart of the stone, and he knew he was secure against all the implements of

man. I prayed again and again; my prayer was answered. An even greater rock fell from Heaven and smashed the head of Jupiter into a million fragments. As usual, the Devil fled wailing and cursing the God in whom I believed.

"On that road to Vienna which is known as the road of the spinsters, the pagans had erected an oratory. I set fire to this. But the devil was cunning; he started to blow the flames in the direction of the monastery where the monks and my servants lived. I climbed upon the roof of the oratory and chased away three of his myrmidons, who were fanning the flames. In this way our monastery was untouched; but the pagan oratory was burnt to ashes.

"And so today after this fashion will every pagan pulpit sheltering evil on the vast *Puszta* of Hungary be destroyed.

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, St. Martin, who is speaking to you.

"The Prince of Evil is a wonderful sculptor, teaching men how to carve human faces out of marble and then claim that they are gods. All over Gaul I have sought out these idols and destroyed them, although the peasants defended them with swords. The Devil had equipped them with many weapons, but finally he always gave in and fled from me.

"Poisonous herbs capable of killing a wild animal were mixed with my food; but they were not strong enough to harm me.

"In *Barria* I was about to destroy a pagan temple, when a thousand peasants, armed with scythes and pikes attacked me. I had been praying for three days for the power to destroy it. And then, on the fourth day, the Lord sent two angels armed with spears and shields. The peasants saw them and were converted;

they destroyed the pagan temple, blessing the name of God.

"My powers then increased, and from now on I found I could destroy the idols by merely touching them. My most difficult task was with a sacred tree.

"The peasants of Gaul were now gradually becoming converted and they began to ignore their pagan temples. But nature symbols still meant a great deal to them. If you cross the bridge across the Perint on your way to Austria, near the Oldalag Tower, you will see a slender pine tree. A tree like this, only much higher and heavier—it nearly reached to heaven—was an object of veneration on the banks of the Seine. It belonged to the Prince of Evil, and since the beginning of time ceremonies had been conducted around it by pagan priests. When I tried to destroy it, the peasants attacked me. A demon on its topmost boughs laughed at me and told the peasants to pull out my bowels and intestines and make ribbons of them, and hang them on the tree like on a maypole. The peasants obeyed this order and bound me, my hands and my feet, and were about to kill me. But I argued with them, telling them that if they did not fell the tree, they will remain the creatures of the Devil.

"Whereupon one of their priests said, 'Yes, we will fell the tree, but on one condition : You must lie at its feet. If it does not crush you and kill you when it falls, we will become converted to the God in whom you believe.'

"I couldn't refuse. How could I, for my hands and feet were bound? I said my prayers in a loud voice as the huge tree was felled. With a sound like thunder, it dropped upon me from the skies. In this moment I felt death in all my bones, and I was sure that my

last hour had come. Then I cried out loud to the God I believe in, 'Good Lord, if you consider me worthy of grace, help me now in this moment of extremity. Save me from the power of evil.' As I said this the falling tree swung round like a spinning top away from me, the Green Bird disappeared from the sky above, and the tree fell on the other side. I was saved! The peasants came around me crying with joy and undid my bonds. They asked me to baptise them in the silvery waters of the Seine.

"Be not afraid, Piroska! None of you need ever fear the big tree. Drive away the Green Bird nestling in its branches, and you will be saved.

"The Devil cannot enter into the soul of all animals. A bear who had killed and eaten my donkey smelled the Devil and accompanied me to Rome on my long journey, carrying my baggage, as my donkey had done. He knew that he had sinned in killing my donkey.

"Sometimes I have lain down to sleep beside people who have just died, and the next morning they have arisen alive. Thus, with the power of the Lord, I have brought to life the dead child of a weeping mother. All these things were done by the grace of God, and Gaul was saved. Now you too, Piroska, pray to God to save Pannonia and Hungary, as He saved Gaul.

"Once bandits tried to kill me in a dark forest. They were possessed by demons with black noses, and cats' claws. There are such bandits today, who incite people to take away the property of others. Their number in Hungary is seven and a half times that of the stars which sparkle in the sky on an August night.

"Yes, in the dark dense forest they have always attacked me. One of them tried to cut off my head. Another, with a scar on his forehead, took all my



money and my clothes. But because I prayed aloud to God and did not offer resistance, he was merciful, and let me go."

"Then in the forest as I wandered naked, the Green Bird sat high on the branches of a tree observing me. Suddenly, on a huge yellow leaf I saw a shining object, a silver coin, which the bandits had dropped. They had forgotten it, and they ran back to look for it. 'There is your coin,' I cried. 'I stand naked in front of you, naked as Jesus Christ was when he was crucified, but I can offer you only a coin. Christ gave everything, his own life, to people whose sins were greater than yours.'

"The bandits were so moved that they returned all my possessions. They sank on their knees and prayed to the Babe who had been born in that distant manger—that Babe who had known oxen and asses before he knew human beings.

"And the demons in these bandits, with their black noses and catlike claws, fled away like frightened sparrows. And I was carried in triumph by these bandits to Paris, where to this day a gate bears my name. And all the while these bandits, who had been so evil and godless, now sang songs of love and goodness.

"The last time I saw the Green Bird was near this gate in Paris where I cured a leper. After this, it never came to plague me again.

"Nevertheless, the Devil won a victory in his own way. He sent a mad bat with rabies to bite me while I slept. I died, and thus the Devil had his own kind of victory, over my tired body.

"But whatever happened to me, there were no more false altars in Gaul, and the big tree was felled. I had won the true victory.

"And now you have heard my story, Piroska. It is I, St. Martin, who is speaking to you."

\* \* \*

While she was telling the story of the sewing-machine, the appearance of the old woman changed. She was no longer the weeping spinster with the pigeon face, repenting her sacrilege in having referred to Our Lord's Beard. She seemed to have forgotten the angry words of Páter Nádor. In spite of the neon lighting, her face was now bright pink. Although she had not retrieved her hatpin with the silver butterfly, her old fashioned straw hat was somehow more jauntily placed on her bun. She seemed rejuvenated, illustrating this last story of the sewing-machine with animated gestures and excited exclamations. At one point, she even got up as she talked and walked about the room.

She tried to imitate St. Martin's voice, so that her own changed. "Yes, I too heard the bandit. He looked like that to me!" she pointed at Penyige in the corner.

Vaszilij brought in some bread and butter and she ate it greedily, while the others in the room fell silent. Szopor leant over his files, making notes.

At this moment through the window looking on to the well-lit corridor a painful wailing could be heard. It was the same sound which the witnesses had heard once before, only this time it was even more tormented, and it lasted longer. It was the sort of painful cry one might imagine when someone's two molar teeth are being extracted simultaneously, without anaesthetic.

Páter Nádor glared horror-stricken at the ceiling. Could this be another hallucination? It seemed that he heard the voice of his Bishop again. But then suddenly

the corridor became silent, as if the extraction of the teeth had been successfully completed.

Szopor, who pretended not to hear anything, said, "Well, Father, it's your turn to tell us your opinion of Piroska Szabó's story."

Páter Nádor opened his breviary. "I would like you," he said, "to grant me a few minutes to consider the matter." He then began reciting in a very low voice the Latin words, "*Et applicuit Samuel omnes tribus Israel, et cecidit. . .*"

He told himself that surely the Bishop must be at home in his palace waiting for him to come to lunch.

Szopor turned to Professor Ballagó. "Let's hear you now."

The door opened with its usual rumbling sound and a very tall man a veritable giant, came into the room. He was dressed in a white overall with a Red Cross arm-band and white trousers, and he even had the small white cap worn generally by surgeons and German cooks. He was a professional male nurse. He placed a file on Szopor's desk and whispered something in his ear, to which Szopor reacted with the mysterious phrase used twice before, "Codliver oil".

Whereupon, without saying another word, the Red Cross giant disappeared, and the doors closed behind him with the same rumbling sound.

"Yes, Comrade Ballagó?"

The face of the archaeologist, who instinctively kept his left hand on his diary in his inside pocket, was very pale. "I too would like to think over a little what I have heard," he said.

"Of course you may. But I gathered you were anxious to leave what you have called our 'mysterious castle'."

"I beg your pardon, it was I who said that," cried Dr. Kis in his usual loud manner, jumping up. "And my

opinions have not been altered in the slightest way by what this silly old woman has just said."

"Well then, let us hear *your* opinion."

The obtuse doctor was still apparently unaware that to diagnose Piroška as suffering from a mental disease was not a part of the *plan*.

"She talked in a childish and confused way," he said. "What I heard in the second part of her story has convinced me even more strongly that there is a defect in the eighth nerve lobe of her brain. I can only repeat that, although I am no nerve specialist or psychologist. This is abundantly clear. The woman has schizophrenia."

"But a little while ago you were still talking about hallucinations?"

"Yes, as a symptom of this schizophrenia. For modern progressive medical science, supported by Marxism, such phenomena are no longer a mystery."

"Clarify please."

Dr. Kis ran his fingers through his hair and tried to make a general assessment. As the only medical man in the room, he wanted to make an irrefutable statement which would lead to his immediate release. "I do not wish to become involved in controversies with the representative of the Catholic Church," he looked at the priest. "Nor would I wound his religious feelings. That is why I think I should state in advance, in front of him, that I consider the Christian religion a lot of humbug. I was christened, it is true, but as an infant incapable of expressing any opinion. I am told, however, by my godparents that I yelled and protested with both hands and feet. Anyway, the priest poured the sacred water over my head, and I suppose I'm a member of the Church, whether I want to be or not."

Szopor's face remained expressionless, not unlike those

excavated headstones they had seen of the tombs of the veterans of the Roman legion.

"No, I do not believe in this so-called spiritual life," continued Dr. Kis. "I entirely agree with the point of view of progressive science supported by Marxism. What we call 'spiritual life'—anyway the word itself is obsolete—is in no way whatever independent of the functioning of the brain. On the contrary, innumerable experiments on animals, especially the scientific researches of the great Pavlov, and the experiments in nerve surgery, reveal quite clearly the inseparable connection between the so-called moral life and the structure of the tissues of the brain."

"Please come to the point, Comrade Doctor."

"The method of investigation now applied to the network of the feeling and neurotic tensions has opened new doors. Thanks to this, we can now clearly diagnose the mental disease of Piroska Szabó."

"You still presume this to be a mental disease?"

"Absolute knowledge does not imply presumption."

"You may have meant a *simulated* mental disease, Comrade Doctor?"

In the character of a scientist concerned above all with the truth, Dr. Kis laughed. "I meant *real* mental disease, Comrade."

"Perhaps you are unaware then that those elements in our society anxious to cause disturbance, who conspire with the Holy See and the Western imperialists, usually try the old trick of simulating mental disease. Cardinal Mindszenty tried it during the interrogations before his trial. But you will remember that he came to his senses during the trial. Quite suddenly."

The doctor was so confident of his own knowledge that he ignored the well meant warning implied in these words.

"No, she's a real mental case," he repeated with involuntary sincerity, "although I am sure that the respected representative of the Church who is with us today," he looked again to Páter Nádor, "will accept the statement that St. Martin's soul could speak through a sewing-machine. In my opinion, however, there is no such thing as a soul."

"I certainly do have a different opinion," interjected Páter Nádor. "Please do not discuss the history of the saints with me."

"As I say, I believe there is no such thing as a soul," repeated the doctor loudly. "The latest experiments reveal that the thing which has been until now called a soul, (mainly to render mankind consciously more stupid, and it was even called *immortal* soul) is in reality an extremely delicate mental-nervous activity. No one will make me believe that the soul of a dead man can speak. And you, Father," he continued, raising his voice, "you believe the fairytales of Easter and Whitsuntide. So you might as well accept the story that St. Martin's voice was heard through a sewing-machine."

Páter Nádor turned away to his breviary and began mumbling some Latin words which had no bearing on the matter; "*Responditque Dominus: Ecce absconditus est domi. . .*"

"In the latter statement we are entirely in agreement with you, Comrade Doctor," said Szopor. "But let us first hear what this simulated schizophrenia is."

"I know nothing of any pretended or imagined schizophrenia," said the doctor, who was firmly convinced that in five minutes time he would be released. "I only state that, Holy See or no Holy See, Piroska Szabó is suffering from real schizophrenia. I state facts of which I am convinced, and my convictions are based on progressive medical science. The word soul, used as an activity of the

nervous system, is merely a collective term, including such primitive emotions as hunger, thirst, depression and fear. Yes, fear! Indeed, the two most important emotions in the nervous system today are hunger and fear. The first is prompted by a stimulus coming from the stomach, the second by a stimulus coming from the cortex. Let us not talk about the soul, diseases of the soul, or the word spiritual. Such things are meaningless. There is no such thing as a 'split soul', but there is a well known disease called schizophrenia. And I hereby state unequivocally that this wretched seamstress revealed in her story of the second vision that her personality is split. Yes, split like a gurkin."

"So you maintain that Piroska Szabó is suffering from a mental disease, a split personality?"

"It is as certain, Comrade, as it is that ten minutes ago someone was screaming over there, beyond the window. Incidentally, I will gladly offer my help there as a doctor, if anyone is in need of it."

"Thank you, we have doctors in the house for that purpose."

"Well, Comrade, please allow me to go, now that I have given evidence. I do not propose to visit Jupiter's statue now, because I must take the first train back to Budapest. To see my patients and my fiancée."

"I must ask you, Comrade Doctor, to be a little more patient. Before you return to Budapest, we have one or two more questions. Firstly, a personal one."

"By all means question me, Comrade. But quickly."

Szopor looked in the files. He read a page carefully, and then said, "Did you once have a patient in Szolnok called Mrs. Gábor Nagy? Aged thirty-two."

"I can't remember."

"Well, let me refresh your memory. You were working at the lung hospital in Szolnok as assistant practitioner

before being promoted to the University of Budapest in 1911. Mrs. Nagy, who was on the staff of the Kecskemét fruit growing unit was your patient. You gave her a pneumothorax."

"A pneumothorax? In medical terms what we now call a thoracoplastic. But what, may I ask, is the point of all this, Comrade?"

"I am simply asking you whether Mrs. Nagy died on the 10th February 1917—during your treatment?"

"She died from embolia an hour after the thoracoplastic, it is true. The postmortem proved beyond a doubt that the two were unconnected, and that I could not in any way be held responsible."

"Ah, I see! How strange it is that all this comes back to you now! So you are convinced that the death was caused by embolia?"

"It is not only I who am convinced, the governing board of the Szolnok Hospital are. But why do you bring up such old stories, Comrade?"

"Because we like to hear all sides of a case. I find a report here stating that the death was caused 'by embolia consequent upon the doctor's false diagnosis'. A report drafted by one of your own colleagues."

"It's a lie," shouted Dr. Kis. "A lie! That colleague tried to ruin me, in order to get my place in the Budapest Tubercular Clinic. But the dirty swine didn't succeed."

"Please sit down, Doctor. You evidently are in need of some of your own sedatives. I shall have further questions to put to you later. In the meantime I ask you to reflect a little. You may perhaps later decide that people *do* simulate mental diseases."

His implication was obvious and the doctor, so self-confident before, suddenly deflated and sat down in his chair gasping. His eyes met Piroška's and she smiled.

The priest and the archaeologist had already noticed



how happy the old woman had become when she talked about her vision. She was now smiling absently, her thoughts obviously far away, ranging back across the memories of her childhood. Something had clearly happened to her, and she was now quite unconcerned by the discussion about her sanity.

"I forgot to tell you something, Comrade," she said, her eyes lighting up, "May I now? I was talking to him and at the end he became silent. So I said, 'Dear St. Martin, you were attacked by the mad bat and you died. But before you died, how did you manage to defeat the Devil? What was your secret?' But although I pedalled as hard as I could on the sewing-machine I received no answer. St. Martin refused to speak to me any more."

"Is that so important?"

"Of course! If one is told that rats are exterminated one wants to know how. What they die of."

Professor Ballagó whispered into the priest's ear, "She's not such a fool as she looks."

The priest affected not to hear, for Szopor was looking at him. It was his turn to state his opinion about the second conversation with St. Martin.

"I trust your breviary has given you some inspiration," said Szopor.

The priest ignored the sarcasm and replied in a firm voice, weighing his words, "I withdraw my former statement."

"But! You no longer consider her mad?"

"No."

"But you said her story was so much saintly rubbish."

"I do not say so any more."

"But this is an extraordinary volte-face."

"Perhaps it is."

"Well then, what do you think her story is?"

"A bad joke."

"This is really going too far! So you think that Piroska Szabó is pulling our leg?"

"I do. Look at her, gentlemen! Just look at her now. At this very moment she is laughing. She's mocking us. You see? Look! Look! She's laughing. Out loud."

Piroska Szabó was sitting in her chair roaring with laughter, whether at herself, at them, or at some mysterious private joke it was impossible to say.

Professor Ballagó could not repress his satisfaction. "The Páter we know to be the wisest man in Hungary. So he should know. What a pity that he was hoodwinked by the Russians when he was in Parliament."

Everybody, the two stenographers included, stared at Piroska Szabó. Her laughter rang out gaily, confirming, as it were, the priest's last statement.

"Will you please amplify your statement, Páter?" said Szopor dryly.

Before speaking Páter Nádor re-arranged his spectacles, with that prim, individual gesture which had been so familiar to the deputies in Parliament during the session when he had spoken for his Party on behalf of the Russians and the nationalization of the banks.

"The first conversation with St. Martin which the seamstress related seemed to me blasphemous nonsense," he said. "After the second, I realized she is simply a practical joker, out to waste hours of our valuable time."

"Is that all?"

The Páter adopted a metaphor, "When a sunken ship is found at the bottom of the sea, a diver is required to examine the treasure."

"Well, Father, we would like you to act as that diver for us, now."

Páter Nádor feared there was a trap somewhere, so he continued carefully, "There are more popular books about

St. Martin, and more legends about him, than about any other Catholic saint. This woman's cultural level is clearly low. She has told us she did not have a proper education, and she undoubtedly spent her spare time reading these legends. I believe she invented the story of the sewing-machine. Frankly, I am not interested in hearing any more of these sewing-machine stories. May I now go please, gentlemen?" He lifted his 250 lb. out of the chair, as if about to leave.

"But you are the only one here who really knows anything about these religious legends, Father," said Szopor. "You can't desert us now."

"May I please say something," said Piroska Szabó. She looked as if she was about to defend herself against the priest's attack.

"By all means."

She smiled. "At the entry to the city of Paris I saw the leper, and he was cured. The nose which he had lost was sprouting again on his face."

At this Professor Ballagó lost his temper and began shaking his fists. "Are we to go on listening to all this nonsense, you silly old woman? Do you want me to come over and knock some sense into you?"

Szopor reprimanded him sharply. "Do not threaten the accused, Professor Ballagó! I will not have threats when I am conducting an inquiry." He indicated that Páter Nádor, who had sunk back into his arm-chair, should continue his evidence.

"In the time of St. Martin," said the priest, "the Roman Empire, and that includes this area, which was then called Pannonia, was officially Christian. The Emperor himself was a Christian. But the population, in particular the peasantry, remained stubbornly pagan. This ill-educated woman, and her fanciful stories, belong to that tradition. She has absorbed these legends. But her

memory is poor, in particular about names. For instance, she is always talking about the philistine. But it was not the philistine, who maltreated St. Martin. It was the *Arianes*."

"That is most interesting," said Szopor. "Thank you, Páter Nádor. Now perhaps, would you kindly tell us who these *Arianes* were?"

"In the first centuries of Christianity they were a fanatical sect who wanted to destroy the rock of St. Peter. We know that in those days there were pagans and *Arianes* in Sabaria. When St. Martin returned to his native town, he had to fight these two enemies."

"Can you explain what she means by the Goddess with the cow's head?"

"No I cannot. But I think I know what she means by a *Kathie*."

"Tell us then."

"Just as she confuses what she calls the philistine with the *Arianes*, so she uses the term *Kathie* for a katechumenos."

"What on earth does that mean?"

"It means a person who is preparing to become a Christian, who is learning the catechism, but who has not yet been baptized. It is well known that St. Martin himself remained a long time in that state. That is why she calls him *Kathie*. Now please, give her a real dressing-down and pack her off home. I hope that today will have taught her a lesson. She won't start talking nonsense about St. Martin again."

"Is her second story about the sewing-machine as distorted as the first?" asked Szopor.

"Yes the whole thing is distorted. It reminds me of one of those distorting mirrors at a fun-fair."

"Would you tell us whom she means by the deaf Salfa? The person who couldn't hear the angels violins?"

"Well, I expect it could be traced in the legends of St. Martin."

"And the demons? And the Prince of Darkness?"

The priest did not answer for a moment. His cunning little eyes blinked behind the spectacles. "Yes, they existed according to theological doctrine, for the demons are the servants of the Devil."

A hoarse triumphant cry came from the corner of the room. "Splendid! Splendid! Stick it in the minutes," said Penyige.

His obvious satisfaction made Professor Ballagó, who had been admiring the priest's adroitness, a little less enthusiastic. He had been fidgeting about in his seat, feeling that he too could add something to the priest's learning. Indeed, he had hardly been able to restrain himself. Was he not the "Falstaff" of his secret diary? Not only the "Lemur", but also the man of knowledge and science, the linguist and archaeologist who knew more about ancient Sabaria than any of them? He was convinced that his own knowledge, together with that of this shrewd priest, would release them from this absurd interrogation. And he made an inner vow that never, under any circumstances, whether by cultural bus or by train, would he return to Szombathely while the Russian Army was in Hungary.

"Well, let's have your opinion," said Szopor.

The professor replied that, both as an archaeologist and an historian, he endorsed the words of the theologian. "No, I agree, she is no fool," he said. "But a practical joker. A clown, if you like."

"This is another change of opinion, Comrade Ballagó."

"Yes, Comrade, I'm afraid this clown in women's skirts has fooled us all. She certainly didn't see St. Martin when she looked at the statue of Jupiter. She played us a joke in midsummer which normally belongs to carnival

time. I had an old aunt myself who used to tell stories about lilac-snow and ghosts on the day of Orbán. And we children all believed her."

"We are not interested in your aunt. Let us hear your view about the Goddess with the cow's head."

"The excavations in Sabaria have proved that pagan oriental gods were often confused with the gods of the Greeks and the Romans. The procession about which this impudent half-wit talks was probably performed in honour of the goddess Isis. She knows nothing, of course, about the oriental religions which originate in Persia. . . ."

"Oh! So there is some basis for the stories of Piroska Szabó, is there? The whole thing is not just sheer imagination?"

"Yes, it has some basis. I could comment further on the image of the diver, which the Father here invented. It is the archaeologist's spade. The spade with which one digs, in order to discover the historical past. I am willing to take a large bet that Piroska Szabó has read somewhere that the sacred animal in Egyptian times was as it happens, the cow. That is why—of course to make fun of us—she spoke of the Goddess with the cow's head."

"Well, I must hope for your sake that you soon get back the position which is rightly yours in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences."

"I hope so too, Comrade. By the way, I think I should add that the Egyptian goddess she refers to *did* have ladies-in-waiting. They were, of course, not called Ann and Charlotte. They were Anubis and Sarapis."

"In fact, when Piroska Szabó speaks of the Goddess with the cow's head, of Ann and Charlotte, she is not lying. She is simply distorting historical facts!"

The archaeologist laughed. "Let us go back a little, Comrades, to the memorial gardens," he said. "There, I can show you the bas-relief which we dug up during

the war. You can see this Goddess, but she has no cow's head. On the contrary, she has a beautiful face. She is sitting on the Sothis dog and beside her stands Mars. The statue represents the flirtation of two gods, the Egyptian Isis and the Roman Mars, the amalgam of two worlds and two religions, East and West, and, of course, of a God and a Goddess. Things were like that here in St. Martin's time. I only wish East and West could shake hands with one another like that today."

"Such a friendly handshake is out of the question at the moment I fear," said Szopor. "Anyway, this flirtation, as you call it, between Isis and Mars has surely little to do with the behaviour of Piroska Szabó who—with what encouragement we shall see—has for years been deluding the people of this town with the prospect of St. Martin returning to defeat Communism. In the circumstances, I think you will agree that is hardly a question today of shaking hands. With adversaries of this kind, all one can do is counter-attack."

This last remark unnerved the archaeologist, who fell silent. The ticking of an invisible clock could be heard distinctly, accompanied by the heavy breathing of Páter Nádor and Comrade Penyige. In this uneasy silence, Dr. Kis suddenly got to his feet, "Perhaps I might now be allowed to go, Comrades?" he said. "Would you mind letting me return home? I imagine I am no longer required."

"You are perhaps bored?" suggested Szopor.

"Not at all. But my patients and my fiancée are waiting for me in Budapest."

"You have heard what these two experts have said. Piroska Szabó is not mad. Someone has taught her her lesson well, and she is making fun of us. Do you agree about that?"

The doctor, who still believed they wanted the truth,

stuck to his original opinion. "I said that this is a case of schizophrenia," he said. "I still maintain it."

"So you believe that Piroska Szabó is mad?"

"Yes, I have already said so. It is supported by the history of her father, an alcoholic who finally hanged himself."

Piroska Szabó was listening intently to this, and she cried indignantly, "That's not true! He drowned himself in the River Perint."

"Rope or water, it doesn't make much difference," said the doctor. "Suicide is part of a mental disease. May I ask the patient one or two questions?" he said to Szopor.

"We are not in hospital," said Szopor, "and there are no patients here. All the same, you may ask."

The doctor addressed the old lady. "Have you ever felt you were being pursued or persecuted?"

The old lady hesitated, then answered mildly, "Yes, as a matter of fact, I have felt that often. Many of us feel ourselves persecuted by the tax collectors. Then, I'm always being pursued by people who want me to join a socialist co-operative. Then, there's our street overseer. I mean the man who lives in Dimitrov Street too, and who is always criticizing me because I go to Mass in the Cathedral. I light a candle on a side altar in front of the mounted picture of dear St. Martin. And then I am frightened at home, when I am alone. Especially at night, when the police do their searches."

"Have you ever been frightened that someone might rape you?"

"Naturally. Every time I see a Russian soldier. My mother died of shame because that happened to her."

"I have no further questions," said Dr. Kis triumphantly. "As the Comrades have heard for themselves, the patient feels she is pursued. She is frightened of being raped. Yet just look at her! Could such a scarecrow



excite any man's lust? I tell you, these are all typical symptoms of schizophrenia. These mental schizophrenics usually identify themselves with God, the Devil, the King, or some other potentate. She has chosen to identify herself with St. Martin."

"But the other two witnesses claim that she says all this as simply a perverted joke," said Szopor.

"Certainly not. The senseless laughter, the sudden unprovoked tears, the mental bigotry, the complacent stupidity. All these are a part of the schizophrenic, following one another without rhyme or reason. Two hours ago she was crying. A little later, she sunk into a kind of dull passivity. Now, she has been cackling like a hen. Just look at her! Do you see that stiff-backed stubbornness, determined to believe she heard St. Martin's voice in the sewing-machine? All progressive medical science—and I may add here that it is backed by Marxist principles—describe schizophrenia as a kind of alert sleep, from which the patient is unable to wake. Although apparently awake, she is really asleep. We could stay here until midnight, she wouldn't wake up."

He spoke so convincingly that everyone in the room, Comrade Penyige included, stared at the old woman. His words seemed for a moment to have shaken everyone's conviction, even that of the policemen. The doctor was delighted with his success. Piroška Szabó meanwhile sat quietly staring at the floor, almost as if ashamed of herself.

"Yes," said the doctor, warming to this theme, "these hallucinations have their roots in her past, her childhood. That her father took his own life is most significant. The lack of security in her childhood, the difficulties of her early youth, the feeling of not being understood, harshness and heartlessness in other people—all this made the split in her personality more marked. She turned her

back on reality and lived in her own world, of torments and hopes. I am sure that these two stories of the sewing-machine will provide psychiatrists with most interesting material. We have seen that the patient, although often asked to join a co-operative, persisted in remaining in the private sector of industry. This too is a symptom of schizophrenia—to retract when confronted with new social tasks."

"In short," said Szopor, "you do not agree with the joint opinion of the Father and Professor Ballagó?"

"Certainly not!" The doctor almost shouted, so convinced was he of his own argument. "The schizophrenic has no sense of humour whatsoever. She would be incapable of pulling your leg like that. Those who suffer from this disease are dreamers, even when they are awake. She cries when she ought to laugh. She laughs when she ought to cry. Just look at her now! She sits here, deep in the bowels of this security police building, as if she were on a river excursion on the Danube, drifting down to Visegrád. May I go now please, Comrade?"

"You may not go, Comrade Doctor," said Szopor coldly. "We are just coming to the most interesting part. The winter coat of His Excellency the Bishop."

In the distance, farther away than before, they could hear once again the wailing of a human voice.

### *Chapter III*

#### *The Winter Coat of His Excellency The Bishop*

This time Páter Nádor felt even more convinced than ever that the gruesome wailing betrayed the presence of His Excellency the Bishop. Somewhere behind these thick walls, perhaps deeper, beneath the earth, was the man with whom he should now be lunching. His head sank onto his chest and he crossed himself, as was his habit when he heard the vesper bells. He took out the polka-dotted handkerchief and started to dry his forehead, at the same time glancing apprehensively at his companions.

They sat there motionless, like statues, listening to the silence that followed the distant sounds. They reminded him of the idols on the excavated reliefs of the goddess Isis. Only the old woman appeared quite oblivious of the sounds and went on happily eating cherries. The priest stole a glance at the plain clothes policemen, hoping that by some sign they might betray what this wailing meant. But neither the cold expressionless face of Szopor, nor the cleft skull of the taciturn, somnolent Penyige, nor the enigmatic face of the black-haired Vaszilij revealed anything. The two stenographers sat with their heads bowed over their desk, their eyes fixed religiously on their notebooks, like devout members of the congregation over their psalters in the church of Tiszadaru. The silence was

broken at last by Comrade Szopor. "Piroska Szabó, it is now your turn."

The spinster spat out some cherry stones into her hand.

"When dear St. Martin talked to me the third time, that was . . . I mean . . . it happened. . . ."

"No, we haven't arrived there yet. I would like first to have your comments on the statements you have heard from the witnesses. You can ignore the accusations and insults about madness which the doctor made. We are convinced you are perfectly sane."

At this Dr. Kis jumped up again angrily. "I object, Comrade! I object! And," looking round, "I might add that the whole of this interrogation seems to me a form of lunacy."

"Please don't be so cantankerous, Comrade Doctor. Nobody asked you your opinion about this interrogation. *You* are the person who is being interrogated."

Vaszilij who sat behind the doctor said something to him, but as it was in Russian Kis could not understand. He had more to say, but he sat down, and began tying and untying his silk tie in his frustration.

"Piroska Szabó," said Szopor, "they accuse you of being a practical joker. They say you have been pulling our legs. What do you say to that?"

The old woman tidied her grey hair under the straw hat, and then in the most natural voice, as if she were at her home in Dimitrov Street, she started talking again. "They simply do not know me," she said. "I am not a practical joker. Never in my life have I cheated anyone, and all my clients have been satisfied with my work. I charge less than Mrs. Kuhinka, and I don't burn the material while ironing it—as they do, I may say, in the Flóra Martos Handicraft Co-operative. You must not accuse me of such dishonourable behaviour. Please, I beseech you, go and ask anyone in town, whether, at any

time since Mrs. Kuhinka was taken to the concentration camp—which meant I had to do much more work—I have ever asked even a penny more than before. No, I work for exactly the same rate, even though I sit at my machine at five in the morning, and the needle is still going up and down at midnight. I know that many people tricked and cheated poor Mrs. Kuhinka. But they couldn't do it to me."

"Who tricked and cheated Mrs. Kuhinka?"

"I think you gentlemen here should know that better than I. Particularly as Mrs. Kuhinka was brought into this very building last spring. To this very house. From which she was taken to the concentration camp. And her poor husband is a seventy-five per cent war invalid. And his tobacconists shop has been nationalized because he was a member of the old police force. Do you know, he heard from her only for the first time last week. Yes, I think you Comrades know the people responsible for all this better than I do. And as the Comrade told me a little while ago that we had complete freedom of speech, may I ask him to set poor Mrs. Kuhinka free. And to put the comrade who tricked her into being arrested with the five dollar bill in the concentration camp instead of her. In the copper mines at Recsk?"

"What five dollar bill are you talking about?"

"I will tell you. But please put it in the minutes. And please investigate the case. And release Mrs. Kuhinka from the concentration camp, where she is working in the kitchen. She is as innocent about that absurd dollar business as you are yourself, Comrade. Well if you wish, I will tell you what happened. Last March, a young good-looking comrade rang her doorbell, and asked her how much she was earning and how much tax she paid. He even wanted to look at her account books, and then he stayed on for a while, because Mrs. Kuhinka invited

him to have a cup of tea. She also gave him coffee, with real cream and some home-made cakes. He said the cakes were delicious, and then he went away. But Mrs. Kuhinka's husband thought this was all most suspicious. He hadn't been a policeman himself for nothing. So he said to his wife, 'The man was sitting in that arm-chair. Have a look and see if he didn't hide anything in it.' And he was absolutely right. There it was, tucked away in one corner under the cushion, a five dollar note! Mr. Kuhinka put it in an old tin cigarette box and buried it in the backyard under an almond tree. But at dawn the next day policemen came to search the house. And among them was the young good-looking comrade who had liked Mrs. Kuhinka's cakes so much. The head policeman said that the Kuhinkas had been denounced for hiding dollars, and that they intended to search the house. But as they did not find the five dollar bill in the arm-chair, they apologized and went away. In spite of this, they came again the next afternoon and took Mr. Kuhinka away. Not because of the five dollar bill of course. They no longer talked about dollars. They said he had killed fifty-six Jews when he was in the Fascist police. This was quite untrue of course because, Mr. Kuhinka was a seventy-five per cent war invalid by 1944, at the time when the Jews were persecuted. They kept him for three days, and when he returned home his face and head were swollen and blue from the blows he had received. They had made him confess that he had hidden the five dollar note under the almond tree. Then they came and dug it up. And because they knew that Mrs. Kuhinka had a sharp tongue and would tell everyone in the town, they decided to take her away too. Since then, she has been working as a cook in the Recsk concentration camp. I managed to talk to her just before she left, and she told me in great confidence, 'I will tell you something very

confidential, Piroška. The good-looking young man who hid the five dollar note in the arm-chair had only one ear’.”

“What had happened to the other one?” I asked. And she said, “There wasn’t another ear. It was a bird’s wing he had there on the side of his head’.”

“There you see,” said the doctor rising again to his feet. “There it is! The proof. Back it all comes. She’s mad. There’s no difference between dream and reality in this woman’s mind.”

Vaszilij grabbed him forcibly from behind and pulled him down.

“Please, Comrade,” continued Piroška pathetically, “punish that young man. You won’t have any difficulty in finding him because of the bird’s ear. It was an owl’s ear. And please release poor Mrs. Kuhinka. I am now having to work for her poor invalid husband. He has nothing to eat, as his tobacconists shop has been taken away from him.”

“We shall investigate your complaint,” said Szopor. “If Mrs. Kuhinka proves to be innocent, the proceedings against her will certainly be dropped. But we want to hear about you, not about her. You are accused by these gentlemen not only of cheating but also of pulling our legs.”

“Who on earth has the time to pull people’s legs these days?” said Piroška. “Don’t you agree, Father?” she turned to the priest.

But Páter Nádor was immersed in his breviary, muttering to himself; “*Locutus est autem Samuel ad populum legem regni. . .*”

He wished that he too, like the Prophet Samuel, could rest on the bosom of the Lord. Or in other words, he wanted to be in the Bishop’s Palace having lunch as soon as possible.

Professor Ballagó stared gloomily ahead, from time to time plucking a hair from his bushy eyebrows.

The doctor could not keep still and he turned irritably to Vaszilij, "Don't give her any more cherries! Take the woman away to a loony bin."

Vaszilij did not answer, because he did not understand.

"And they dare to say that I am pulling their leg," Piroska continued indignantly. "Have you the faintest idea how miserable is my whole wretched life. I am always worrying that I shall be short of thread for my sewing-machine. I haven't time to think of anything else."

"There!" cried the doctor again. "What did I tell you? She's afraid! You see, she has a complex."

She ignored him. ". . . and if the thread is gone, the work is gone. I have to fill in a special printed form for more thread, and then to queue up for it at the People's Store in Vorosilov Street. Yes, of course I am afraid. I'm afraid they will raise my taxes again, too."

"Fear is the pregnant symptom of the split soul," cried the doctor.

Szopor looked at him contemptuously. "Your symptom is bad manners," he said. "Half an hour ago you said there was no such thing as a soul. Sit down!"

"It is not only thread we have to queue for," continued Piroska plaintively, "but for cellophane. We use it to bottle jam, for the winter. Yes, Comrades, in the winter I say, not the summer. For if you don't queue up in the winter for cellophane on Vorosilov Street, you can't bottle apricot marmalade in the summer. There's no cellophane in the People's Store in the summer."

"We've had enough of your complaints, Piroska Szabó," said Szopor. "I'm prepared to believe that you're not playing a trick on us, that every word you say you mean. I believe you're sincere."



"Well, Comrade, perhaps *you* believe me. But the Father here says that I'm pulling your leg. And I assure you I certainly haven't time for that. I have far too many other worries. So many, that sometimes I think I shall cry. I don't make jokes. Only last week, I was given a municipal document, an affidavit, saying my bread ration was to be taken away. I was told officially that because I am self-supporting, I am no longer entitled to a bread ration. I! . . . self-supporting! Please tell me, will you, Comrade, where is my tiny bit of field, even as big as the palm of my hand, where I can grow wheat to support myself? And then they say I am a practical joker! Who has the time and the energy to go round pulling people's legs?"

Dr. Kis again could not resist a remark. "You see, she's whining again. She alternates between whining and laughter."

It was true that tears were now streaming down the poor old woman's cheeks, behind her steel-rimmed spectacles.

"I must speak about Balog, the shoemaker!" she continued woefully. "Look what happened to him! He died last month because he was over-taxed. His furniture was auctioned, and his 856 lasts of land requisitioned. They made him join a co-operative. Well, with him yes, I know, he's a born joker. It's in his nature. He would even make jokes standing under the gallows. When he lost his land, he said to me, 'Piroska, you don't read the newspapers. If you did, you would know by now that there is nothing the matter with this country. Everyone is happy. You would know there are no accidents, no suicides, no robberies. The newspapers don't say there are any, do they? So there aren't any. There are no railway accidents. Nor do cars ever skid into trees. No one hurts his neighbour. No one is robbed or killed—except of course the

Fascists. Life is so blissfully happy that people don't even die. They can't have died, can they? The newspapers don't publish obituaries.' Well, Balog always makes jokes like that. But I can't. I'm too tired. All the same, I'm afraid I may have his fate. Comrades," she said imploringly, "please save me from having to join the Flóra Martos Handicrafts Co-operative!"

"Don't worry, Piroska. We certainly shan't confiscate your sewing-machine. It is a productive part of society," said Szopor soothingly.

"Then, any day I may be expelled from my flat. Our house in Dimitrov Street no longer belongs to me. My mother sold it after the liberation to my uncle Zsiga Janiga. You know, that nice kind well-to-do shopkeeper whom everybody came to, even from as far away as Szentkirály, Herend and Olad. As long as there were oranges, figs, dates, everyone bought them in his shop. My mother was badly in need of money at the time. That's why she sold it, at the time of the introduction of the new forint. The forint was still a good currency, and in 1948 Uncle Zsiga paid the sum of 20,000 forints for it, because he intended to open a new shop there. He had no idea what was about to happen to him. Not long after the comrades came to his grocery shop one evening when he was about to close, and requisitioned everything. They took not only his many fine liqueurs, tinned foods, margarine, coffee, tea, but the contents of his cash register. Even his hat! They said, 'Sigismund Janiga, none of this is yours because everything belongs to the people now. And you are an enemy of the people'."

"Please, Piroska Szabó," said Szopor, "I must ask you to keep to the subject. This has no connection with your sewing-machine."

"Oh, but it has. Old Uncle Zsiga was taken away that

autumn with his sixty-three years old wife to a wretched village on the shores of the Tisza. His daughter and her husband were taken to a concentration camp. They have a sweet little daughter, you know, Katica Somoló. Out of that large family she is the only one who has remained in Szombathely. Her nanny is looking after her at a flat in Popular Front Street. So you see the house is no longer mine but it belongs to Uncle Zsiga. Although I am living in it, I can be expelled at any moment. And at any moment they may want to open a branch of the Flóra Martos Handicrafts Co-operative in it. Please, Comrade, save me!"

"Don't be afraid, Piroska Szabó. We shall see you remain in your flat."

"Oh thank you so much, Comrade! But please look! Why is the Father looking at me like that? I have done him no harm, but he is annoyed because I said I was not pulling your leg."

"You must have confidence in us, Piroska Szabó. I fully understand you. According to the Comrade Doctor, the big tree which was felled by the Gallic peasants and which failed to kill St. Martin is a figment of your imagination. But the Father and Comrade Ballagó think you read about it somewhere. I cannot agree with any of them. We have listened patiently to your two stories. And now we want to hear the third. So please tell us what your sewing-machine said to you the third and last time."

"It was last September," she said excitedly. "When the rumours were going round that His Excellency the Bishop would be the next on the list for prison. Following His Excellency the Archbishop."

"Exactly. Well tell us about it in your own words."

"I had thought a lot about the comrade with the owl's ear, who had hidden the five dollar note in Mrs. Kuh-

inka's arm-chair. I was sewing the winter coat for His Excellency the Bishop, thinking about the terrible countless lies which are told about people nowadays. Why, I asked myself, had they to take even his hat from poor old Uncle Zsiga? And 856 lasts from the shoemaker Balog? And why couldn't little Katica Somoló with the forget-me-not blue eyes be together with her mother? My heart was aching because of all these heartless things. And I thought perhaps tomorrow the comrade with the owl's ear will try and trap His Excellency the Bishop. Then I shall be thrown out of my flat, and they may even take my sewing-machine. As they took the lasts from the shoemaker Balog. And then I sighed, 'Dear St. Martin! You were attacked by the mad bat and you died. But before you died, you managed to conquer the demons. How did you do it? . . .' And then, while the needle was jumping up and down, St. Martin began talking to me again, for the third time. He answered my questions while I was sewing the winter coat for His Excellency the Bishop."

*Based on the Minutes of the Hearing*

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you. My most constant companion was the Green Bird, whom I had known since childhood. I had met him for the first time in the park one evening, where he had his nest in the huge poplar tree. That park no longer exists in Sabaria today, but you can visit the site. Leaving Kiskar Street you turn into Óperint Street, cross the bridge over the Perint, (where your father jumped into the river), and turn your back on the national drugstore, (called the 'Golden Snake' in the old days), and there, opposite, was once the park. Our house was on the hill, near where steps lead up to the Varkosöz today.

"The Green Bird had sickle shaped wings. He flew, making big jumps in the air, like the German Luft-waffe crash bombers. He used to sit on the poplar tree cleaning its feathers, and singing his songs. But sometimes he would perch lower down on a hawthorn bush, from where he could entice me more easily. He wanted me to come up, and said he would teach me to fly. He generally appeared in the evening when the thrushes had already gone to sleep. He had a yellow collar, red legs and sharp claws. His feathers were the colour of the beautiful pinewood of Olad, when the sun sets behind the Austrian mountains in the evening, before a storm. A golden crown glittered on his black velvety head, and a star-shaped sign twinkled on his forehead. He was the king of the nightbirds. He watched me with his gimlet eyes, and when he spoke it was with the voice of an owl. He frightened me but I did not chase him away. Then one day, when he flew in at my window, he sang so beautifully that I asked him to come into the house. This was unwise because when he had taken the bread I had offered him, he flew into the courtyard, fastened his claws onto my mother's coat, and flew away with it. My mother cried and cursed me.

"For a long time after this I did not see him again. The first hairs were sprouting upon my upper lip, and my father had made me join the army and exchange the plains of Pannonia for those of Gaul. Here I served many a hard year, and my father had great plans for me; he even hoped I would become a Colonel! His own life had been unsuccessful; he had never been more than a sergeant in the American Legion. That was his rank when he retired and received from the Emperor 120 acres near Olad and sixteen slaves. He hoped that one day I might become Governor of Pan-

nonia. Then, he said, we would have ten times as many slaves, and would own the beautiful town of Olad.

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Martin, who is talking to you.

"I was an N.C.O in the Hussars, and I had a long sword. Every morning I obeyed the orders of my officer and sharpened it on a huge grindstone in the barrack-yard. This was necessary because we were always taught in our exercises that we must behead our enemies with one single stroke.

"I still was a *Kathie*, but I felt at home on the banks of the rivers in Gaul, as if I had been in my native Pannonia. Sometimes, our squadron would be sent to the coast and I would look at the sea, which seemed to me no more than another, bigger Lake Balaton, with the island of Britain in the far distance, a kind of new Tihany. (We were near the spot on this coast, incidentally, where Eisenhower came ashore to meet Sztalin.)

"It was a rich land. The cattle of Gaul were fat and opulent, nourished on the verdant pastures. The rivers were teaming with fish, and there were no hungry or starving people. The Gauls love hunting and the forests were full of game. Our dogs seized the wild boar by their ears, and we hunted and killed the deer on fast horses. My comrades drank the famous red wines of Gaul, but I preferred the cold fresh water from the spring.

"In winter the fogs came over from Britain and covered the whole land, and we were frozen, for we had only one overcoat. If we failed to protect our ears with our scarves they were frostbitten. The slaves felled trees in the neighbouring woods, and in the barracks we lit great log fires. The River Szombat flowed through our encampment, and in January it was frozen

solid. Our officers, the young gentlemen from Rome, roasted the beef on spits and drank yellow apple brandy with it. Yes, we the army, could face the winter for we had food and fuel, but some of the poorer local people died of starvation. As in the Soviet Union today, it is always the under-nourished who succumb most quickly to the cold.

"Although the Green Bird sat on a branch in the barrack-yard, he was never cold. Yes, he had followed me. He had lost me in Pannonia, but now he had found me again in Gaul.

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Matrin, who is speaking to you.

"The Green Bird visited me often, and on one occasion he brought me a dead mole in his beak, and hid it in my bed. The royal crown was still glittering on his black shiny head, and he still had the star-shaped sign on his forehead. But I was angry with him, for I remembered that he had killed my mother's goat. I chased him away with a sword; but he always returned.

"One day, a Roman lieutenant stole the squadron funds and escaped to Britain. We could not be paid and the bread supply ran out, so we had to live on the wild boars which we hunted ourselves. An N.C.O. sent me to the nearest town to ask the baker to give us a thousand loaves, which we would pay for when the Emperor sent us our pay from Rome. It was very cold and wolves were slinking about outside the town. The comrades had sent me, for they knew I was a *Kathie*, and they trusted me. They thought I might get some bread from these people for I had often talked to them about the Lord, of how He had found bread for five thousand starving people—and that when all had eaten their fill, there was still enough to

fill twelve large baskets. The Green Bird accompanied me all the way on this mission in the dead of winter, curious to see if I succeeded. And I did. The people trusted me. The baker promised to bake us all the bread we required.

"The Green Bird was shadowing me, flying from roof to roof behind me as I went. He followed me to the town. Sometimes he would rest on a chimney like a stork, or on the heads of the idols in the gateways. But always he observed me closely. He had been ordered to do this by the Prince of Darkness. He was the police investigator in the country where the Prince of Night is dictator. As other people are followed by their dogs when out for a walk, so I was followed by the Green Bird.

"In his mouth he carried a dead toad which he brought to me while circling above my head, almost striking me with his sickle shaped wings. I struck at him with my sword, and he dropped the toad. Then, still watching me he perched on a well.

"Can you hear me, Piroska? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you.

"As I was returning to the barracks that evening, I was accosted by a beggar. He was half-frozen and he stretched out his skinny arm towards me. His tears were frozen on his beard.

" 'No, I have nothing to give you,' I said, 'neither money nor bread. One of our Roman lieutenants stole the company funds, and we have not been paid for weeks. But the baker in that town has promised to give us bread. If you will come to the cookhouse door after dark this evening, I will give you some.'

" 'By nightfall,' he quavered, 'I shall be frozen and dead. Don't you see I'm half naked?'

" 'But what can I do, my good fellow?' I said. 'The



Roman Emperor doesn't give us two greatcoats. I've only one and I'm frozen too.' Then suddenly a strange voice inside me spoke to me. It was like the sound of bees humming in my native Pannonia, when the summer winds are blowing. And the winds seemed to carry my cape off my shoulders. Then instinctively I unsheathed my sword and cut my own greatcoat in half. I gave half to him.

"The Green Bird had been watching us, but at this action the royal crown fell from his head, and he flew away croaking. I returned to the barracks.

"When the moon rose that evening, I waited with a loaf of bread at the cookhouse door. The beggar did not come, but he visited me later that night in a dream. There were two angels beside him, and the ice which glittered on his beard reminded me of the rings on the fingers of rich Roman gentlemen. I saw that he was wearing the half of the greatcoat I had given him, and that the rest of his body was covered by rugs. He spoke, and then I knew that he was Jesus Christ. I had shared my clothes with Our Lord.

" 'This is Martin,' he said to the angels, 'who gave me half his coat today, so that I should not freeze.'

"After this, the Prince of Night's demons never molested me again. I had not done anything very great; I had only given away a part of a coat. But this act was enough to keep him and his demons away for ever. This too was why the Beautiful Young Man could do me no harm. This was why he could not kill my father. This was why the big tree, when it fell, could not crush me. This was why the man with the red staring eyes could do nothing to defend his pagan altars in Gaul when I destroyed them.

"But the Green Bird later discovered me again. As usual, he did not come near, but he observed me closely

from a distance. He now knew that, thanks to what I had done for the beggar, I would defeat the Devil wherever I met him.

"Can you hear me, Piroška? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you.

"I wish that the great potentates of this world who think they can destroy the Devil with pikes and swords would only heed me. One day, I shall return to Sabaria and then you too will be rescued. No would-be murderer will harm you, and if he sets fire to your house you will have nothing to fear. And our friend Salfa will hear the violins of the angels.

"Nor will the priests who surround him, helped by their modern demons, be able to hurt him. They may be able to produce the disease of Spanish Flu in Paris, but it will not touch him. He will live until the Lord calls him. Even if he becomes a leper, his missing nose will grow again. For rich men have only to give away a half of what they have, and then the angels will chase away their tormentors, even if they are incited by pagan priests. Give a half of what you have and no more, and then the lightning will strike the white tower in a new Amboise, and a huge rock will fall on Jupiter's head from heaven. On that day, I will be with you in Sabaria, where I know you are suffering so greatly. Then the altars of the Prince of Darkness will be destroyed again, and an angel will descend from heaven, crying, 'Great Babylon is destroyed! it was the home of all the devils, the abode of all the evil spirits, and the evil bird itself.' Then we will celebrate our victory together.

"Can you hear me, Piroška? It is I, Martin, who is speaking to you.

\* \* \*

The old woman had related the first story of the sewing-machine in a voice so tearful that by the end of it she had reduced her little lace handkerchief to a damp rag. The second story had been more cheerful. When she referred to the number of false idols which the Saint had destroyed in Gaul, she had even stood up and laughed. In the third story, the tone was different again. She had transferred the account this time into a poem, which she recited as if it were part of Hungarian epic poetry. Her face lit up as if sunlight had suddenly fallen upon it, as if she were a music lover who had suddenly heard the greatest music in the world. When she came to the part where St. Martin took his cape off and cut it in two, she even gesticulated with her arms, imitating in her imagination the gestures of the Saint when he stood on the banks of the River Szombat. Finally, when she spoke of the angel descending from heaven, she sank on her knees before Comrade Szopor. So spontaneous was the genuflection that her skirt was drawn up her legs and a large tear was visible in her cheap grey cotton stockings. But she lifted her right arm to heaven, after the manner of the Faithful in those first centuries after Christ. "Dear St. Martin help me!" she cried. And she remained in this position quite unaware, it seemed, that she was in the security police cellar of a Communist State.

A silence fell, broken only by the mysterious ticking of the invisible clock, together with other sounds which seemed to emanate from some other machine, as well as tremors and rumbles, as if an earthquake was taking place somewhere, but far away. Piroska was still kneeling, when Szopor asked Páter Nádor his opinion of the third story.

The priest, who was leaning over his breviary intently, as if some greivous spiritual harm might come to him if he interrupted his reading, did not answer. Szopor then glanced at the archaeologist, but he had shrunk back

into his chair, indicating that he preferred to hear the priest's opinion first.

Dr. Kis of course jumped up excitedly. "Until now we have had ninety-nine proofs that the patient is stark raving mad. Now we have the hundredth proof."

Comrade Szopor told him to be quiet, and continued questioning the priest. Páter Nádor made significant little gestures, shrugging his shoulders and turning the palms of his hands outwards. In the old days, rich Budapest solicitors used this gesture to indicate to their clients (from whom incidentally they received their fees in advance), that there was nothing more to be done; the case was hopelessly lost. Perhaps Pontius Pilate made the same gesture before washing his hands. But Comrade Szopor was not to be fobbed off with sign language. "To begin with, Father, you called her a saintly ass. Then you said she was playing a hoax on us all. What is your opinion now, after this third account?"

*"Recordare Domini testamenti tui et dic Angelo percutienti: Cesset jam manus tua . . ."* murmured the priest.

"Don't talk to us in Hebrew. We don't understand it."

*" . . . ut non desoletur terra et ne perdas omnem animam vivam."*

Professor Ballagó glanced at the priest despondently. He had picked his left eyebrow so insistently during the interrogation that it now resembled an old worn out broom. There was not much left of it.

"Let me help you out, gentlemen," said Szopor. "We have now heard the three stories of the sewing-machine. Although all were told in the same naïve manner, particularly the last one, they strengthen my opinion that we are here dealing with a premeditated plan, based on precise scientific historical references."

*"Ego sum qui peccavi, ego inique ego: isti qui oves sunt quid fecerunt. . . ?"*

"Take his prayer book away from him, Comrade Szopor," said Penyige from the corner of the room.

Páter Nádor put his breviary away in his pocket; the almost indecent haste of the movement contrasted oddly with his earlier dignified gestures.

He now spoke in Hungarian, "I do not intend to take any part in the whole affair," he said. "It is not my concern."

"So it is not your concern! You claim this matter does not concern you? Where a famous saint is involved? You are not concerned when someone tells us of the heavens opening and an angel descending, to announce that he will demolish the county headquarters of the Hungarian Workers Party in Szombathely! He will liquidate the people's police. The Soviet Hungarian Society. The Association of Democratic Hungarian Women. Our socialist kindergartens. So you are not concerned with all that! I beg your pardon, Father, but you had better not treat us as if we were junior stable lads on the Puszta. We didn't come down with the last shower of rain. You can't play that trick on us. Please don't forget we are Budapest cockneys."

The priest's shrewd little eyes blinked behind his spectacles. "I consider myself competent to pronounce where representatives of the Church discuss God and the Devil," he said. "But in the matter of the fairy tales told by this unfortunate seamstress I consider myself unqualified to judge."

"Are you aware, Father," said Szopor quietly, with a new tone in his voice, "that it is in my power to ask you, far less politely, what is your opinion of the third story of Piroska Szabó?"

"I will testify about what I heard in the memorial

garden. The woman's own words. Yes, I will testify to them; to facts. But without comment. And then please be so kind as to let me go. I was due to have lunch today with the Bishop. I fear it is far too late now."

"We shall be delighted to show you the way out with every possible courtesy, but before that happens I want to know if you have revised your opinion in any way. I refer to your statement that Piroška Szabó picked up her tall stories not from her sewing-machine, but from books about popular legends."

"Yes, I still maintain *that*."

"What then do you *not* maintain? Come on. Out with it!"

The great fat body of the priest slumped in his arm-chair, and his little eyes blinked nervously behind his glasses.

"Well, I confess I didn't find the third story a laughing matter at all. I take quite a different view of that one from the other two."

"If it is not a hoax, what is it?"

"As I say, I am not competent to judge. No doubt the doctor can help us here."

Doctor Kis was only too glad to jump up again. "Of course," he cried, "it is, as I said, schizophrenia. With the lissipation of the *nervus acusticus*."

This time Vaszilij grabbed him very roughly and pulled him down in his seat. Szopor continued questioning the priest.

"Does the third story correspond with the legends about St. Martin?"

"Yes."

"On what do you base that statement?"

"The Church considers St. Martin's deed in sharing his cape as the finest sword stroke in the history of mankind."

"Really."

"The world has never heard of so illustrious a sword stroke. As a representative of the Church," said the priest with a sudden enthusiasm, "I can endorse every word there."

"This really happened?"

"The halving of the cape?"

"Yes."

"I have told my own congregation from the pulpit on many occasions that the swords of the generals are nothing but fragile toothpicks compared with the sword of St. Martin."

"Do you remember one of your sermons on this theme?"

"Certainly."

"Would you be so kind as to tell us the gist of it?"

"Certainly. I normally say: Consider the swords of the generals. The whole world trembled before Attila's sword. The sword of Charlemagne created a European empire. The sword of our own king László the Saint put the enemy to flight. The French *Chansons* tell us that Roland with one stroke of his sword split a rock in twain. The swords of Richard Coeur de Lion and of Roger of Denmark chopped up the enemy as housewives chop up parsley. But these are puny, powerless little swords compared with St. Martin's. The like of it has never been seen before or since. And not until that day when the sky dwindles and all the elements melt in the heat of the Day of Judgement, and finally the words of the prayers are at last fulfilled, 'Thy Kingdom come. . . .' This is the sermon I preach on St. Martin's Day."

Szopor was either surprised or impressed, for he leant forward on his elbows and thought hard. At last he said, "You claim that Piroska Szabó learnt the last story by heart?"

"I have no idea where she learnt it. There is such a thing as inspiration."

"Then she was inspired by someone."

"No, I mean inner inspiration. I believe there is such a thing as the soul. I disagree with the doctor here."

Dr. Kis was about to jump up again, but this time Vaszilij had grabbed him before he could move.

Szopor made some more notes, and then said severely, "According to all you have said, you can hardly be considered incompetent to judge. This matter seems to concern you very closely. You now announce that this miserable woman—as you have called her—is inspired?"

"Yes, that is what I said. But it is not for me to see into the depths of the human soul. God alone can do that."

"And we too, of course," said Szopor serenely.

"I will quote the words of St. Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy," said the priest, ignoring this last remark. "'I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience as did my ancestors'. I cannot, in good faith and with a clear conscience claim absolute certainty for anything I say about this woman."

St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy did not appear to interest Szopor. Seeing that the old woman was still kneeling in the middle of the floor, he said to her as if she were a child, "Get up off the floor, Piroska Szabó! Sit down properly, in your place! Would you like some more bread and butter?"

The woman about whom the Páter would not commit himself stared at Szopor as if she had just been woken from a deep sleep. She got up obediently, arranged her skirt and sat down. "Yes, Comrade," she said, "I wouldn't say no if you offered me a little more."

Professor Ballagó could not help being impressed by the clever answers of the priest, and he interrupted un-



wisely, with that enthusiasm which is characteristic of intelligent people. "This woman really is astonishing!"

Szopor turned to him curtly. "So the clown in the skirts has suddenly become astonishing, has she? Not bad! Perhaps you could tell us something more. Where is the River Szombat? In France?"

"I have little doubt that we should take this to be the modern River Somme."

"And Ambosia?"

"Not far from Tours. Where St. Martin was a Bishop. There is a small French town there today called Amboise. This is what she was probably referring to."

"Were there any N.C.O.s in the Roman armies?"

"*Fabula Narratur*. Why not?"

"Damn you! For goodness sake, don't let's have you saying your prayers any more."

"I only said 'a story is a story'. Anyway, why shouldn't there have been N.C.O.s in the ancient world?"

"What did St. Martin know about the aeroplanes of the German *Luftwaffe* she referred to?"

"You ought to ask the Father about that. I believe that, according to religious doctrine, those who have been saved—that is, who are saints—have the power to see for themselves all happenings on this earth, in the future as well as in the past. St. Martin must therefore have known that a man called Hitler would appear one day. And presumably such a man would have a *Luftwaffe*."

"Then he knew that there is a People's Democracy in Hungary today?"

"Undoubtedly. But that leads us into theological fields. Please, Father, assist me in this matter."

"*Locutus est autem Samuel ad populum legem regni . . .*" murmured the priest, who was deep in his breviary again. He didn't even look up.

"A few minutes ago," said Szopor, "you were talking about a half-witted trickster who created a fairy out of a god with the head of a jackal. Do you consider she is no longer a hoaxer?"

"Her last story has disarmed me," said Professor Ballagó.

"She disarmed you with her statement, I suppose, that the house in which St. Martin was born is concealed on the most remote staircase leading to the Várköz. And you, an archaeologist, believe this?"

Professor Ballagó scratched his balding ginger head. "Dear Comrade, these matters are not quite as clear as one might at first sight suppose. Things which one believes, or does not believe, are not quite . . . well . . . just the same as, let's say—'Here's an onion. Peel it!' She has undoubtedly read about St. Martin. But well . . . I'm afraid I can't explain it to you, Comrade. There's something very slick about the way she tells her story."

"Slick?"

"The Father called it inspiration. I will call it something else. I will call it the death of Arthur Hallam."

"Please stop talking in riddles!"

"I am referring to the young Englishman, Alfred Tennyson, who was so shaken by the death of his best friend, Arthur Hallam, at sea, that he suddenly became a poet. At least, he imprinted all his verse with the feeling of that loss. The most diverse poems, on all sorts of subjects, are informed with it, from *Locksley Hall* to the *Day Dream*. He even put it into his portrait of the Sleeping Beauty. I won't deny, of course, that there may be something in her claims that the park where St. Martin first saw the Green Bird was opposite the pharmacy called the 'Golden Snake'. But forgive me, will you, if for a moment I slip away to the lavatory?"

"Is it urgent?"

"Yes."

"All right. But can we first take the following statements made by you for the minutes? You state that there is a similarity between the mind of an Imperialist English poet and that of Piroska Szabó when she told us these three stories? Particularly the third one? May I put that down?"

"Of course, Comrade, but quickly, as I really must go out. You might add if you like the words of our poet János Arany, 'It is not the reality, it is the heavenly equivalent which gives poetry to a song'. I must confess, Comrade, that I am enchanted by that quality in her confession. She really told us something quite charming."

"We are not interested in charm or enchantments. They are tantamount to witchcraft. You are merely praising the qualities to be found in any witch woman of the backward African tribes or, for that matter, in the priests of the Vatican. Marxist Leninism rejects anything concerned with superstition."

"I fully understand that," said Professor Ballagó humbly.

"You told us that Ambosia means Amboise. And Szombat means the River Somme. Can you tell us who the Prince of Darkness she refers to is?"

"There doesn't seem much doubt about that. He is the Emperor of the Devils, Lucifer. Or if you like, Mephistopheles, the man who . . . who makes the 'Lemurs' dig the tomb of the blind Faust. But please really, I must go out. Please, Comrade?"

"What is your opinion about the Green Bird?"

"In the Louvre in Paris there is a very famous seventh century statuette. A.D. of course. (That is, before our modern method of assessing years in Hungary was introduced.) The statue has wings and is known as Pazuzu,

the Demon. It is almost as famous and valuable as the Venus de Milo. You have heard of it, Comrade?"

"I have. The Venus de Milo. Anyway, we're not interested in the statues which France stole from her colonies. We hope one day to see that they are given back to their rightful owners. . . . So, according to you, the Green Bird is a demon?"

"Considering what the old girl said, that, I'm afraid, is the only explanation."

"And you yourself, do you believe in demons?"

The archaeologist began picking his right eyebrow again. "A difficult question," he said. "But first we must clarify another point. The question of the existence or non-existence of angels. According to the Church, the demons are fallen angels." He turned to the priest. "Are they not, Father?"

*"Audi Domine hymnum et orationem quam servus tuus orat hodie. . . ."*

"Please answer Comrade Ballogó's question, Father," said Szopor. "Do you believe in demons?"

"I do indeed," answered the priest. *"Respice Domine de Sanctuario tuo. . . ."*

By now, the unfortunate archaeologist was in such agony that he was unloosening his belt. "Please, Comrade, let me go out. Only for a minute."

"Of course, you may. But I must warn you of something first. If we are in Church, we take off our hats, place our fingers in the sacred water, and put a forint in the collection box. Well, in this building we have the same sort of ceremony. We undo our shoe-laces and give them, with our trouser belt and our penknife, to the guard who accompanies us. Or should I perhaps not say 'we', but visitors like yourself. In short, before you go to the lavatory you must obey our rules. Although of course I do not imagine for a moment that you have any

papers on you which you would like to put down the drain."

Professor Ballagó went pale and sat back heavily in his chair. "No, it's not as urgent as all that," he said.

Szopor consulted his notes again. "Let me now make a summary of what we have heard. The Prince, the beautiful young man, the demon with the eyes of a red lamp, the Green Bird, they all, according to the Catholic Church, exist. Just as we all exist. As there are good people and wicked people in the world, so there are angels and demons. We can agree, therefore, that everything Piroska Szabó has told us in her three stories about these unknown persons is accepted by the Church. Is that not so, Father Nádor? I would like a definite answer."

"Yes. They are acceptable. But with certain reservations."

"That is not a definite answer. Yes or no? That's what I want."

"Yes. But may I add something?"

"All right. Add it."

"This unfortunate seamstress has apparently read a great deal, a whole library of legends I should say, about St. Martin. These legends are written in the style of thought and expression of the Middle Ages. So that for us they are to some extent difficult to understand. The modern man, assuming he is a good Catholic, rejects the notion that the devil may appear among us in the body of some animal or other human being."

"Is that all?"

"One other small thing. It is unusual in our rational age to accept the concept of the Green Bird. But we must not forget, gentlemen, that the mind of this poor woman, sitting day after day in her workroom, at her sewing-machine, is quite different from ours. She has spent her lifetime reading legends about St. Martin. Look at her

now. The poor woman's eyes are red, owing to the quantities of sewing she has had to do. Not to mention all the legends about the Saint she must have read."

He said this without much conviction, because he would have preferred not to give any opinion. As he spoke he remembered very clearly the words of the ex-tailor's assistant, the man who was now head of the entire Hungarian Ávo, who had once said to him confidentially, "We shall destroy our enemy as in a game of chess. We shall wait until he takes a risk with his knight."

"Piroska Szabó," said Comrade Szopor peremptorily, "Put your hand on your heart, and tell us where you read all these stories."

She was enjoying her bread and butter, and before answering she wiped her mouth. "I didn't read them anywhere," she said. "I have told you only the truth. St. Martin spoke to me three times while I was sewing. And he promised to come back to Szombathely one day."

"Put it down in the minutes! Word for word!" interjected Penyige, whose voice was hoarse with emotion.

The archaeologist was now in considerable pain, and he cursed himself again for having brought his diary. He looked helplessly at the priest, but the Páter was intent on his breviary, his lips moving silently.

"The witnesses's statements are inconclusive and self-contradictory," announced Comrade Szopor coldly. "We must therefore re-examine the three stories."

## *Chapter IV*

### *Exit Dr. Kis*

At this Dr. Kis jumped up again and almost shrieked, "So you're going to start it all over again! Well, I call that the limit. Why the hell should we sit here a moment longer?"

Szopor let him shout, and even made a sign to Vazsilij not to thrust him back in the seat.

"Until now," continued the doctor excitedly, "medical science has not succeeded, either by biopsy or by chemical examination, in discovering the exact cause of schizophrenia. Nevertheless, there are some cases where the symptoms are as plain as a pikestaff. Here's a case. Comrade, you can't waste our time any further. You too, I'm sure, have other, more important things to do. This woman needs a different treatment from the one you're giving her. She ought to be medically examined."

"Do you suggest X-rays?" said Szopor. "Or do you want to examine her saliva?"

"I'm suggesting a psychiatrist, Comrade. A mental examination by an expert. Her grey cortex and the eighth nerve pair require careful diagnosis. I would suggest some insulin and shock treatment. Anyway, mental patients are of no interest to me in my work. Please, Comrade, let us go home."

"Bluffy," said Szopor, using another code word.

"I don't understand, Comrade?"

"I wasn't talking to you."

"Well, whom were you talking to?"

"It's none of your business. I warn you again for the last time to keep quiet! We're not interested in what you think. Although you are a doctor and a lung specialist, it is clear that you don't understand this case at all."

"Might I point out it was you, Comrade, who asked my opinion. Yes, of course I'm a lung specialist. So what's the point of keeping me here?"

"We have a very good reason."

"What?"

"You will recall how, after your blunder in the hospital where you killed the woman, you finally learnt how to deal with a pneumothorax. On that occasion you inserted your knife in the wrong place in the poor woman's body. Well, we intend to teach you now that your theory about a split in the personality of Piroska Szabó is an equally fatal diagnosis. Now sit down and shut up."

The doctor was sorry that his fiancée, Viola, had not joined the Party, as she could have if she had wished. Had she been even a candidate member, he could have insisted now on being released.

Szopor had meanwhile turned to the priest.

"I haven't anything to add," said Páter Nádor.

"So the unfortunate woman," said Szopor ironically, "doesn't need your help?"

"She's eating too many cherries. She doesn't know what she's talking about."

Piroska interrupted indignantly. "Please, Father, don't say that, about eating too much. I'm hungry. And please don't accuse me of having read all those things about dear St. Martin in books. Every word of what I said is true. I heard it all."

The priest knew that the men he was dealing with



were automata, their minds, thoughts, even characters, cut to a pattern, as stereotyped as the pattern Piroška used for cutting out her dresses. When he had been a minister, he had learnt all about it from his old friend, the little tailor who on the arrival of the Russians suddenly emerged in the uniform of a lieutenant-general, decorated with innumerable medals. He had learnt that these security police officials are specially coached in Moscow on how to turn the truth upside down, to prove black is white if it serves the ends of World Communism. And he recognized this training today in Szopor. He knew that the code words "codliver oil" and "bluffy" have a meaning in Moscow terminology; that these men, too had their "plan" which they must "over-fulfill" if they were to advance in their careers. He knew that this eternal demand for "over-fulfilment" of plans was responsible for the endless session today, sitting here for hours in the neon lighting, tens of feet beneath the ground. And he thought, as he looked at the old woman, that the "plan" really did resemble a model dress. They sewed it in this building; then they hung it up in the shop window of the public mind. "Proletarians of the world" it said, "be vigilant. Be always on your guard against the Holy See and its allies, the Western imperialists." The model could be adapted, like Piroška Szabó's dress which she altered for herself. But it was always the same model. As he stared at the wrinkled face of the old woman, he knew that she was telling the truth; but he also knew the truth was of no importance. All that mattered was what Szopor intended to prove. The priest therefore decided not to say any more. He would keep quiet, because he knew that, whatever he said, Comrade Szopor would turn it upside down—for the sake of the "plan", for the sake of Marx, Lenin, Stalin—using a logic far more effective than that of any university logician,

because it carried with it the argument of the rubber truncheon. And he began to feel a curious sympathy for this little old woman, the grey little bird which had somehow strayed into this Twentieth Century streamlined cage, where the other birds talked as self-confidently as parrots. Although he did not believe the story of the sewing-machine, he was by now convinced that something extraordinary had happened in the mind of the spinster. When he looked at that devout face, with the deep wrinkles under the eyes, he realized that she was so completely convinced in her own mind of the salvation St. Martin had promised her, that she would die for her beliefs. "Such lightning and thunder will come upon earth, as never was seen before, and every island will be whelmed by the seas, and the mountains will be seen no more."

"I have nothing more to ask this unfortunate woman," he murmured, and he bowed his head.

"And you, Professor Ballagó. Anything else?" asked Szopor.

As the archaeologist stared at Piroška Szabó his self-confidence ebbed, and he suddenly felt lost. It was the same feeling he had known many years ago as a child, when he had been lost in a small boat on Lake Fertő, and suddenly everything around was grey, the sky above and the reeds below. "No, I have nothing to ask," he said.

"Would you like to go to the lavatorv?"

"No thank you, it is not as urgent as all that. I would prefer to wait until you are satisfied with the three stories. Then perhaps we can all go. I hope it won't be long."

Szopor made a peremptory gesture, not of pity for his straining belly, but of contempt, as if to say, "You, a learned scientist! what a really childish way to talk! it won't last long!"

He ignored the plea, "I now intend to recapitulate

and evaluate these three stories," he said. It was the first time he had used the fashionable scientific-political expression "recapitulate and evaluate".

"I think we are all clear about the first story," he said. "She speaks of the red lamp. This is the five-pointed red star of Communism, the one and only hope of peace for the oppressed peoples of the world. These stars are to be found shining throughout our country on every public building, a token of our glorious socialist future. According to the joint opinion of the priest Páter Nádor and the land surveyor Professor Ballagó, this lamp is the eye of the devil."

Having disposed of this, he went on to the next symbol in Piroška's story. "*Beware of the dogs*," she said. She frequently repeats that in her story. Now who are the dogs?"

Here Páter Nádor felt he must intervene. "The symbol is clear enough," he said. "She is referring to human passions. They guard the house in her story (that is the human soul) and will not allow well-intentioned visitors to enter. They will, for example, not allow love of our neighbours to enter. Nor goodness, nor mercy, nor humility. . . ."

"That's quite enough, thank you, Father. We do not agree with that woolly unscientific theory. According to the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist historical scientific view, the human being throughout history has been influenced by economic factors. Transformations in the methods of production are more important than human passions. Anyway, our modern socialist state is proving it by shaping history, without subscribing to these ridiculous inconsistencies and anomalies which are connected with human passions."

Although Páter Nádor had heard this many times before, the complacency with which the man announced

it suddenly infuriated him, and he lost his temper. "I tell you," he almost cried, "only Love can conquer these passions. Even death itself. The crown of thorns which our Lord wore has influenced human history more profoundly than a hundred years of Brazilian coffee-bean production."

"Please don't get so excited, Father! That is another meaningless, and if I may say so, woolly remark. You have no way of proving it. On the other hand, we can *prove* conclusively that the misery and penury of the Brazilians—since you refer to them—whose vast coffee production has often been poured into the sea, is directly due to capitalist exploitation. But let me continue. As I say, it is clear that the dogs in her story refer to us, the security forces of the Hungarian State. Beware of the dogs, she says, beware of us."

Páter Nádor shook his head in furious disagreement. His heart, which beat irregularly due to the huge adipose frame it had to serve, was now thumping indignantly.

"And who are these hawing *Kathies*," Szopor continued. "We cannot accept the arbitrary etymological explanation of Father Nádor. She is referring to the people who listen, secretly of course, to the emissions of Radio Free Europe, and are afraid of the threats of the American imperialists. Although they call themselves supporters of the People's Democracy, they waver, they have not the courage to ask for admission to the Hungarian Workers' Party. And what about the philistine? The storyteller gives here a cover name to our comrade, John Tatár, the Minister of the Interior. In a sense, we who work subordinate to him, and guard the peace of the Hungarian People's Democracy are also philistine. While the demons she speaks of are the soldiers, or armed squadrons of the Ávo, generally referred to by reactionaries as the 'blue Ávo'."

"I cannot agree with this interpretation of the vision of a deeply religious woman," interrupted the priest, "This unfortunate person, by some inspiration. . . ."

Szopor interrupted him, "Yes, I agree, there is certainly inspiration. There you may have something. But we will discuss that later."

"She is an ardent believer," the priest continued his defence of Piroška Szabó. "And the Church accepts the existence of demons. The Church accepts that an invisible world exists, alive and real as our own visible world. It is a great mistake to attribute ideas to Piroška Szabó which cannot possibly have entered the head of such a deeply religious woman."

"We do not accept this notion of an invisible world," said Szopor. "Your invisible world, with its angels and devils, its heaven and hell, serves one purpose only—to perpetuate fear and poverty on earth, so that the priests and their allies, the capitalists and land-owners, can exploit the working classes and enjoy themselves without working. We believe instead, that with the help of progressive science, we can create a prosperous material world. That is what we believe in—the visible, tangible world. We're not afraid of your threats."

The priest had now taken new courage from the old woman's sturdy defiance, and he said tartly, "Who's threatening whom, may I ask? Surely, *we* are the ones who are threatened?"

Szopor pretended not to hear and continued, "What about Babylon? Here the story clearly predicts the destruction of Moscow. Then, 'the Goddess with the cow's head' and her procession? Your explanatory remark about Ann is typical petit-bourgeois thinking. A child would tell you that this is a joke at the expense of the proletariat's greatest anniversary, May Day. And Ann and Charlotte? Who are they? They are the two honest

woman comrades who usually carry the placards and pictures of our leaders at our processions. The Green Bird is the symbol of the armed Ávo frontier guards who wear green as their insignia, guarding our frontier against the imperialist spies, saboteurs and secret agents who attempt to infiltrate into our country. The Green Bird, as she calls him, is also there, to see that our own enemies inside Hungary, who are in contact with the Western imperialists, do not leave the country with their treacherous information. You will observe that the storyteller has more to say about the Green Bird than about anyone or anything else. This is because the Green Bird is remarkably effective. It protects our People's Republic with conspicuous success today."

"I shall defend this pious woman against all these absurd allegations," said the priest. "She has probably never even heard of the green Ávo. I share the opinion of our friend Professor Ballagó entirely. There is nothing more than innocent folklore in all this. The allegories you read into her statement are ridiculous."

"Innocent folklore? Ridiculous allegories? We will see just how innocent the one is. And how ridiculous the other is. Wait a moment. But meanwhile let us continue. The 'Beautiful Young Man with the owl's ear?' Here, I must say, she has really become too impertinent. This is the unfortunate Comrade, General Mihály Ferkó who, poor man, has no ears. Because—as I think most people in Hungary know—he had them torn off by the Fascists when they tortured him during the war. That is why he wears his hair long, on both sides of the head. But this is the type of vulgarity one could expect from the people who taught her her story. They have no cause to admire the heroic struggle of this man to liberate Hungary from the Fascists."

While this argument was going on, Professor Ballagó

had managed to tear a page out of his diary which he had screwed into a small ball and put in his mouth. He noticed, however, that while Szopor was "evaluating" the stories, he kept a close eye on him, so that he dared not chew the paper. It remained in the corner of his mouth.

Páter Nádor's courage increased; in the huge mountain of flesh something was simmering. "As I have stated for the fourth time," he said, "the woman has probably never heard of General Mihály Ferkó, let alone his ears. As a matter of fact, I have just heard of it for the first time myself."

"You're being most unco-operative, Father. We have too much experience of the Catholic Church and its Jesuitical subtleties to be taken in by this so-called innocence."

Páter Nádor had once been a good debater in Parliament; he had even argued with the greatest son of the Hungarian nation, Rákosi himself. He adopted the same tactics now. "When the fifth sound of the trumpet was heard," he said oracularly, "the Apostle John saw the keys of Hell falling down from Heaven. I suppose that, too, was a piece of Jesuitical subtlety. But I've yet to hear that anyone accused John of intending to use the key to open the Hungarian Socialist State Treasury."

"Please, we have enough to discuss with Piroska Szabó's smart stories without introducing apostles and keys to Hell."

"Smart stories! If there is one smart story on earth, it is the one about the devil only existing in the imagination of pious seamstresses."

"Do not waste our time, Father, with unnecessary sophistry. In the first story, as you remember, St. Martin wanted to kill his father. What did that mean? It meant, 'Kill every Communist, even kill your own father—if he is a Communist'."

(It was at this point that the archaeologist began surreptitiously chewing the page of his diary.)

"That is a lie," shouted the priest.

Szopor waved his hand. "Allow me to quote a part of the first story. 'Both the father and the son have a beard'. She is referring to two people with beards, whom she wants to make appear ridiculous. She is, in fact, making another poor joke, this time about the beards of Comrades Lenin and Marx. We will now go on to evaluate the second story. This tells us most ingeniously how to destroy the demons, and the most hardened of them, the Ávo security police. Then we have the 'Prince'. We have heard about him in all three stories. Although generally invisible, he sometimes appears in the body of a human being, or in an animal's skin. He even inhabits the bones of the deceased. This is a direct reference to Comrade Sztalin. Are you aware, gentlemen, that condign punishment is inflicted for such slander?"

There was a deathly silence. One of the stenographers blew his nose.

"I don't have to tell you the punishment inflicted according to the new criminal laws, for such slander. On these occasions, I assure you, the workers of Hungary become indignant. And here it is again, 'The body of the murderer was decaying under his tomb'. This is a clear reference to the trial of the late Foreign Minister, László Rajk. He was executed. This implies, I gather, that the murderers tend to kill one another. Then we have the devil, who having entered the body of an ox, butts the coachman of the monastery to death with his horns. This is clearly the trial of Archbishop Mindszenty. The coachman of the monastery is the Cardinal, and the ox is the Hungarian People's destined leader. Incidentally, you all of you, share this view about our leader."



"All of us!" cried the priest. "But *we* haven't uttered these allegories. We are witnesses. You can't blame us because a poor seamstress has a vision about an ox while she sits at her sewing-machine."

"You appear from your statements to be taking her side and agreeing with her. Someone is undoubtedly behind her in all these stories, so you must be agreeing with him too." Szopor looked at the priest closely. "In view of this, you still consider Piroska Szabó your charge don't you?"

"Ah, at this moment," said the priest to himself, thinking of Szopor's earlier chess metaphor, "he wants to force me to move my knight into danger."

He returned Szopor's steady gaze and did not reply. He had no intention of saying yes or no.

"The deaf Salfa," continued Szopor, "cannot hear the violins of the angels because of the incessant cries of the devil. Here she is evidently mocking Comrade Salamon, the Deputy Chief of the local county committee, at whom, I am sorry to say, certain of our comrades who lack self-control have been known to laugh on account of his deafness. Then we read that St. Martin expelled the evil demon from a servant. In other words, he drove the Marxist Leninist philosophy out of his mind, and won him over to the Catholic Church. Then we come to Spanish Flu in Paris. This is an allusion to our French Communist comrades who spread the virus of Communism in the West. Then we have, 'you have never suffered as a human being does, show me your wounds!' This is a wicked attempt, a dirty imperialist slander on our Comrade Stalin, implying that he was never at the front during the Second World War, that he was not wounded, yet he decorated himself with many medals and gave himself the rank of Generalissimo. Then she says, 'We must avoid those who talk about science.' This means, of

course, that we must refuse to attend the Party Seminaries where the science of Marxism is taught. St. Martin goes around Gaul mounted on an ass, preaching everywhere against Comrade Stalin. 'I have demolished his altars and destroyed his churches,' he says. This is an open incitement to mutiny and acts of sabotage. They are now, as you know, punishable by death after summary jurisdiction—the sentence being carried out within twenty-four hours. . . . Then we have 'The White Tower in Ambosia has been demolished.' Naturally, for a counter-revolutionary to succeed, the radio tower at Ferihegy in Budapest must be captured or destroyed. Why deny it, Father! Why deny it!" He became excited. "You know as well as I do what is meant by the 'great rock' which crashes down from heaven and smashes Jupiter's head in Aquitania. The storyteller is encouraging the Americans to drop an H-bomb on Moscow. Then the 'pagan saint's relics' will become ashes, like Hiroshima. Then 'the mutiny of the Gallic peasants'. This is an attack on the alliance of the peasants and the workers of Hungary. Then we have the 'huge tree' she speaks of, which did not fall on St. Martin. This is to encourage the kulaks to sabotage our plan, and sell their produce on the black market, and so on. Because the People's democratic system will be destroyed anyway, that is her idea. When the big tree falls it will not crush those who pray piously to the Vatican. What do you think of it all, Father?"

"*Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner,*" said the priest. "If you can understand her so well, forgive her."

Szopor went on, "The bear ate St. Martin's ass, but afterwards he carried the saint's possessions to Rome, as the ass had before. In other words, the Russian bear soon will have his stomach sated. He will become so tame that he will make a pilgrimage to Rome to see the Pope."

"This excellent little legend about the ass, the bear and St. Martin," replied the priest, "has been depicted by at least a hundred painters in the past. All of them interpreted it in a different way. Your interpretation is, I must say, a very original one."

"The burglars," said Szopor, "who attack St. Martin in the woods and undress him: are, of course, we communists. The communists, needless to say, are all robbers. However, even the robbers can be bribed. The coin is the American dollar. The robber then becomes as gentle as a lamb. . . ." A threatening tone came into his voice as it rose indignantly. "All these things are bloody lies!" he cried. "Disgraceful slanders! Someone will pay for them!"

Meanwhile, Professor Ballagó considered himself lucky. He had managed to chew the second and third pages of his diary, and he was so busy on the fourth that he missed these menacing words. He hoped to consume the whole diary, and then ask permission to go to the lavatory.

The doctor, who was listening closely, found himself trembling. He crossed and uncrossed his legs in his agitation. Piroska Szabó had finished an entire plate of bread and butter, and had now moved back to the cherries.

"We have now arrived at the third story, the worst of all," announced Szopor.

"An open invitation to sabotage," said Penyige, making one of his rare interventions from the corner, which showed that he had been following more closely than it appeared.

"In the last story," said Szopor, "the Green Bird follows Martin from Pannonia to Gaul. St. Martin halves his cape with the beggar, and then obtains power over the devil. The Green Bird flies away crowing with fear. This,

if translated into comprehensible language, means what? It is a secret message to the West and to the Vatican. There is only one possible way to prevent the world-wide victory of Communism. That is for the capitalists to share their wealth with the people. The landlords must give half their estates to the peasants. And the industrialists must do the same with their profits. Are you aware now, Father, how dangerous it is to protect this woman who pretends that what she was told in that witch's kitchen, the Bishop's Palace, came out of a sewing-machine?"

"You are deliberately falsifying a perfectly innocent story," said the priest, "Now you talk about a witch's kitchen. Or was that phrase simply a *lapsus linguae*?"

"We do not make mistakes in our language, if that is what you mean."

"But for heaven's sake, dear sir, you have just said you don't believe in the existence of demons or devils. And now you talk about a witch's kitchen."

"Comrades Marx and Lenin used the word God, although they denied the capitalist bourgeois conception of the word. We shall have completed our new dictionary in about a hundred years time. Then, and only then, will these absurd old words and phrases have disappeared from the vocabulary."

"All the same, until that day arrives, let us at least try and understand one another through the absurd old words," said the priest quietly, as if indicating he was prepared to make peace.

"Impossible!"

"Why is it impossible? I worked with the Communists during the worst period of the Nazi occupation, and we were on the best of terms. We understood one another perfectly. The Lieutenant General, who is at present the head of your respectable organization, whose hospitality we are at this moment enjoying, will support me on this,

I am sure. He knows me personally. In those days, I was his frequent guest—in a small back street in Budapest, near the old Elizabeth bridge. He was very astute in concealing that he was a Moscow agent, this ex-tailor's assistant. Yes, we understood one another perfectly then. So you see that in certain circumstances there are common grounds on which Christianity and Communism have been known to meet. We only demand respect for the human being and the work he does. We have before us the example of the foster father of Jesus Christ, St. Joseph. He was a simple carpenter, a man whose hands had become hard and horny at his trade, who. . . .”

“You are wasting your breath,” said Szopor. “The new world which we are bringing into existence is the exact opposite of the one you are talking about. By idealizing your stupid saints, you perpetuate and glorify poverty and misery. We intend to abolish poverty. You are only interested in enriching yourselves and your Church. We, on the contrary, want to make everyone rich. You promise happiness after death. We promise it in this life—if we can get rid of men like you. We shall give the people undreamt of wealth. By adoring your wretched cross, you glorify death. But the red star we believe in is brighter than the sun and expresses our faith in life. The poets and writers of your rotten system feel, most of them, always insecure, constrained by society to think of nothing but themselves and their daily bread. Our poets view death merely as the natural decay of material, and are prepared at any moment to give their lives for the sacred cause of making mankind happier. In our poetry you will find no fear of death; because Comrade Zhdanov has done away with it. You believe in all sorts of invisible creatures, angels and devils and other incorporeal bodies. We intend to conquer the entire material world and reign over it, thus benefitting the human race. We are ignorant

about angels and devils I admit, but we know about Stakhanovites, first-class workers—and treacherous priests! No, no, Father, please don't imagine there is some point where we can meet and understand one another. Such a place does not exist."

Páter Náder knew perfectly well that decisions about the fate of Piroska Szabó—and their own—would not be taken here, by this man. In some other, perhaps very distant, office or prison their destiny would be settled. He therefore put his hand in the voluminous pocket of his cassock, (which had a strange resemblance to the pouch of a kangaroo), and took out his breviary. He opened it at random and began talking to himself. "*Judica me deus,*" he muttered aloud, as giving the only possible answer to this tirade, "*et discerne causam meam de gente non sancta, ab homino iniquo. . .*"

"Yes," said Szopor, "in the witch's kitchen of the Bishop's Palace a clever plan has been evolved to destroy the proletarian international and prevent the world revolution. But this is not all that we have learnt from Piroska Szabó's story. We are now aware there is someone behind her, who has trained her in this jargon. In spite of all the talk of angels and demons, it is a very flesh and blood creature who has taught her, and encouraged her to propagate her stories among simple-minded people. A human being conceived this plan to sabotage all that we are trying to do to raise the people's standard of living. We now have to find that man. . . . What are you chewing?" he turned suddenly on Professor Ballagó.

"A bit of bread," the Professor pointed to the old woman's empty plate.

Szopor returned to Piroska Szabó. "When did you last talk to His Excellency the Bishop?"

"In April."

"Not since then?"

"No. Because during the May services in honour of the Holy Mary, I was prevented from entering the Bishop's Palace. Since then no one has seen His Excellency. He is under house arrest. At least that's what people say."

Páter Náder looked up from his breviary. The Bishop had not been seen since May? This was news to him. He had evidently been misinformed in Budapest. Anyway, the time for lunch was now long past. He reflected uneasily that perhaps he might not see the Bishop again.

Szopor pressed a button, and spoke into the telephonic machine on the desk. "Codliver oil," he said sharply. And then, solemnly, to the three witnesses, "What I now tell you will not, I think, be news to any of you. Piroška Szabó has been in close contact with the Bishop. Her three stories were all inspired by him. We know that his aim was to overthrow the present Hungarian Government with the help of the people of Szombathely and the county of Vas. They reveal his close association with the Holy See and the Western imperialists."

"But all I did was to send His Excellency a winter coat," said Piroška Szabó pathetically. "He has never even mentioned the name of St. Martin to me. Although I admit that I've often spoken to him of the saint."

Dr. Kis was still crossing and uncrossing his legs. At this he jumped up excitedly. "It's ridiculous!" he cried. "This lunatic's ravings are being used against the Bishop. The well-known medical phenomenon of the eighth nerve pair is being used to. . . ."

He said no more because, at this point, Vaszilij the Russian, who was sitting behind him, hit him on the head with a piece of lead piping. He fell over and his nose started to bleed. In no time at all, his flowered necktie was soaked with blood.

Szopor said something in Russian to Vaszilij. Vaszilij

leant over and took hold of the doctor's feet. He then dragged him out of the room, rather as peasants might drag a dead horse along the street. The door opened and closed automatically behind them. A bloodstain on the floor marked their passage.



## *Chapter V*

### *His Excellency the Bishop*

#### *1*

"By the way," said Szopor in his most matter-of-fact voice, "His Excellency the Bishop is also a guest. Let's get his opinion about Piroska Szabó's stories."

This remarkable announcement was followed by a long silence.

Piroska who was still eating cherries, suddenly dropped one as she put it to her mouth. The words seemed to bring her out of a trance. She began brushing the bread-crumbs from her skirt, arranged her hair and generally gave the impression that she was preparing to face reality.

"So it *was* his voice," said the priest to himself. "No, it can't be true. . . ." He put his right hand to his heart which was so embedded in fat that he could hardly feel it beating.

I wish, thought the archaeologist sadly, I had remained with my stones and engineers at Kaba.

Szopor offered Páter Nádor an American cigarette, took out his lighter and leant across the desk to light it. It would be too much, he seemed to imply by this polite action, to expect the priest to shift his mountainous body towards the desk. He did not offer Professor Ballagó a cigarette, but lit one for himself. For some minutes in the room, a new aroma, of the subtle Virginian tobacco,

replaced the cheap shag fumes always associated with smokers in a People's Democracy.

"Poor Doctor," quavered Piroška, looking at the door. The others didn't speak.

This silence continued for some minutes while they all puffed away, broken only from time to time by Comrade Penyige clearing his throat. Once or twice he swung round in his chair and looked inquiringly out of the window, through which the colours of the artificial autumn sunset could still be seen.

Then the familiar trundling sound, accompanied by the minor earthquake, indicated that the doors were opening again. Through the doorway came the huge male nurse wearing Red Cross insignia, supporting a thin old man in a cassock, on whose head was a small red skull-cap.

"Goodness. His Excellency the Bishop!" cried Piroška, and jumping up she ran to kiss the episcopal ring.

The hulking fellow who was acting as nurse, and who revealed himself when he stood upright to be as tall and broad as a circus giant, brushed her aside. He even gave her a little shove in the direction of the chair, so that she shot back into it like a rabbit. She stared wonderingly at the Bishop. How old and thin he had become since she had last seen him in April! He was nothing but a bag of bones. "Oh dear," she cried involuntarily.

"Don't be afraid," said the nurse to the Bishop. "Pull yourself together man!" He put his hands under the Bishop's arms to help him to the chair where, a few minutes before, Dr. Kis had been sitting. But the Bishop clearly couldn't pull himself together. He stumbled past Páter Nádor who, scared out of his wits, had risen to his feet; his head was deeply bowed and the small cross was swinging rhythmically from his neck. Halfway across the room he caught sight of Penyige, and although his steps faltered, he tried to continue to walk towards him, a

ghastly half smile or grimace on his face. He even made a friendly wave with his hand, as if he had seen an old friend again. It resembled, the Páter thought, the gesture the Bishop often made when blessing the congregation as he entered the Cathedral, while they knelt before him. But Penyige was not kneeling.

The Bishop had deep wrinkles round his pale thin lips, pursed like those of an old woman, which Páter Nádor had not noticed before. They were not wrinkles produced by old age and bodily weakness, but by something else. They made the priest suddenly think of a picture by Grünewald depicting with crude realism a scene from the Crucifixion.

Comrade Penyige spoke to the Bishop in a tone of voice which would have been familiar to the card players who collected on Sundays in the notorious Abbazia Café in Budapest. "I shan't declare all my aces today, Bishop," he said, and then more sarcastically, "nor the Holy Family.\* Sit down there! There's a good chap."

The Bishop, still grinning horribly, stumbled and then stopped. His bowed back revealed a long skinny spine under his cassock, and he suddenly put his hands to his ear, as if to show that he had not quite caught Comrade Penyige's words. At the same time he quavered, but quite audibly, "Today I don't want any more codliver oil." His voice resembled the bleating of an old goat.

"Well old man, don't be afraid," said Penyige heartily, "Anyway you're no longer sick, you won't be given any more codliver oil. Why, you've even got your cassock and cross back! What on earth do you want more for? Sit down my friend, and be quiet. Pretend you're attending High Mass."

The old man remained standing in the middle of the room, his back bent, looking like a skittle which would

\* He refers here to a well-known card game connected with the possession of the picture or "family" cards, a blasphemy which gives delight in certain circles.

topple over at any moment. But then something happened to him. He shook himself like a dog, or like the clown in a Punch and Judy show when the wires are suddenly taughened. He freed himself from the grasp of his keeper, pulled himself up to his full height, at the same time raising his right hand as if towards heaven. The silly grimace was gone and his expression became benign and serene. And thus he remained for some seconds, without moving, reminding Páter Nádor of the great statue of St. Gellért which once dominated Budapest from across the Danube, the cross held high in the saint's hand. He remembered too the "liberators" who had tried in vain to shoot this cross out of the stone hands of the saint. These reflections only made him more apprehensive for the immediate future. To what did the Bishop's admonitory forefinger pointed in the air refer? Páter Nádor half expected him to pronounce one of those outspoken anathemas of the "deeds of the Apostles".

"The moment has come," he said to himself, "when the Bishop of Szombathely will raise his voice again and speak out as St. Peter once spoke out in the Salamon aisle of the Jerusalem Church. He will quote the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, and the God of his fathers who gave us Jesus Christ." Certainly the Bishop had somehow regained his episcopal dignity; he might have been standing before the altar in his own cathedral, with the organ majestically intoning the harmonies of the Kyrie Eleison. He raised his right hand higher and higher, so that the heart of Páter Nádor, beneath its layers of fat, began to thump until he felt it was almost about to jump out of his body. He waited for the anathema which would upbraid Penyige for all his sins, at the same time offering him the traditional forgiveness for these sins, in the famous words of St. Peter, "Repent and be converted to the Faith. God will forgive you your sins and will send

Jesus, the Messiah, to you, who was destined for you too. . . ." He felt sure that the Bishop was about to pontificate—but not a word issued from his mouth. It was as if he had second thoughts, or his strength had suddenly failed him, for he lowered his arm gradually, as a flag might be hauled down. He buried his face in his hands and began to weep. Instead of proclaiming sternly, "You sinner, you denounce the saints and the truth," he cried like a child. "I don't want to have another bath today," he whined through his tears.

The Red Cross nurse—who was evidently no more a Red Cross nurse than Vaszilij was a waiter—took him forcibly by the shoulders and thrust him down in the chair in which the doctor had been sitting.

The old man's head was bowed on his chest, and on the thin brown skin of his neck a sinew was throbbing, while he mopped his eyes with a handkerchief. If he had not been wearing a cassock, or a red bishop's cap, no one would have taken him for a Prince of the Church. As Páter Nádor looked at his white hair, he found himself thinking of another man he knew in Tiszadaru, an ex-innkeeper called Bálint Lepke, who had had the same sort of experience. He had thick white hair like the Bishop's, and showed no signs of going bald, although he had been nearly seventy-two. Bálint Lepke's hair had gone snow-white in a few weeks. For every Wednesday, at 7 o'clock in the evening, he had had to report to the police, who questioned him about the kulaks and the black market. Although he was molested and beaten up, he refused to say a word against his friends. He was too proud to tell anyone but the priest of his regular ordeal, of what happened to him every Wednesday night in the cellar under the police headquarters. As a result, only Páter Nádor understood why he finally committed suicide. That last Wednesday evening, he had disobeyed

orders and had not reported to the police. Instead, he went down to his own wine cellar, where he drank until he was dead drunk. He then poured a can of paraffin over himself and his suit, and set it alight.

It seemed to the priest that he now saw the old peasant in front of him again, only with a Bishop's cap on his head. Their origins were the same, and in the hardship which the Bishop had just undergone this was clearly revealed. For the Bishop of Szombathely was not one of your aristocratic bishops, his ancestors were not among the nobility of the Arpád dynasty; he was not a count, not even a knight. His old mother had always gone about in a shawl, both in winter and summer, like any other peasant in the county of Zala. In short, he was the reverse, both in origins and in behaviour, of that famous bishop of Veszprém who had opposed the Russians in 1945. As a true Transylvanian nobleman, he had assembled all the women and girls of the town in his palace when the Russians arrived, and announced that he would defend them with his own body. The Soviet soldiers came for them, and when he refused to allow them to enter, they shot him dead. A thousand women wept that day in the episcopal palace of Veszprém.

In the uneasy silence while the Bishop dried his tears, Páter Nádor tried to assess the situation. He reflected woefully that all his collaboration with the Communists in the past had been in vain. Neither the Church in Hungary, nor the Pope in Rome, had benefitted from his attempts at conciliation. "Your Excellency . . ." he began murmuring in a low voice.

But the Bishop either did not hear, or did not want to hear. He was occupied exclusively with his handkerchief. He was probably thinking of nothing but his last sentence. *He did not want to have another bath.*

As Páter Nádor looked at him, he could not forget

the peasant Bálint Lepke, who had set fire to himself, and the Bishop Apor who had been shot down in his own palace opposing the Soviet soldiers. He now knew that on two earlier occasions he had heard the Bishop's voice in this room. He knew, too, that the naked man who had appeared so suddenly in the corridor with the bandage over his eyes had been the bishop. He had been having his "bath".

2

"Give him a dry one," said Penyige to the nurse. The Red Cross giant took the tear soaked handkerchief from the Bishop and gave him another.

"The Bishop of Szombathely is present at the interrogation of Piroška Szabó," announced Szopor pompously. He turned over the pages of a file which the nurse had brought in with him. Then he got up quickly and went over to the corner, where he conferred with the chain-smoking Penyige. He showed him the file and Penyige said, "That's patent."

Hearing the Latin word, Páter Nádor pricked up his ears. Translated literally "patent" means open, clear; but coming from Penyige's lips it might well have the opposite meaning. He had not been able to judge if Penyige was a well educated man; or had he picked up the Latin word at a Party Seminary? It might mean anything.

Comrade Szopor went back to his desk, and turned the two sharp eyes of his otherwise impassive face on to the Bishop. "I ask you," he said, "to tell us something about the dollar notes found in the sewing-machine of the seamstress Piroška Szabó in her flat in Dimitrov Street."

"My sewing-machine!" cried Piroška in horror.

"Keep quiet, Piroška! Yes that's what we want to find out. Here are the dollars, 486 of them. Two hundred-

dollar notes, five fifty-dollar notes, three ten-dollar notes and six one-dollar notes. You can all have a look at them." He picked up a bundle of American dollar notes and waved one of them in front of Páter Nádor's nose. "The serial number of this one is, you will observe, B14327197," he said. "It has the portrait of a bearded man called Grant on the back. We have established that among the 5,860 dollars hidden in the cellars of the Bishop's Palace, there are about fifty bundles where the serial number also begins with B14. They, too, have the picture of the bearded Grant on the back. A big shot in America once, wasn't he, this Grant? So you see, we're getting near to establishing where the financing of all this sabotage comes from."

He paused, watching their faces. "According to the Bishops testimony, *signed with his own hand*," he said weighing his words, "he received these dollars from a secret courier sent by the Holy See. They were to finance a conspiracy to overthrow the People's Democracy in Hungary. We shall shortly bring this courier forward. But what we want to know now is, when did the Bishop of Szombathely hand the 486 dollars over to Piroška Szabó?"

"It's a lie!" cried the old woman in a sharp voice.

"I didn't ask you," said Szopor, turning to the old man who was still drying his tears. "I asked His Excellency the Bishop. Please be so kind as to tell us how the dollars came into Piroška Szabó's possession."

The Bishop didn't answer. He sat with his head still bent on his chest. As at High Mass, when his assistant was late or not very skilful in helping him before the altar, the same wrinkles appeared on his forehead. The people of Szombathely knew them well.

"Tell me," urged Szopor.

"I . . . I don't know . . ." muttered the old man.



"What do you mean, you don't know? Here is your own testimony, signed by yourself less than an hour ago. In it you admit that the person you confided in most was Piroska Szabó. Well, there she is, sitting next to Father Nádor. Do you see her? Do you recognize her?"

The Bishop turned his head slowly, looking first at the priest, then at the seamstress. His brown staring eyes expressed nothing but fear and misery. Páter Nádor realized, to his horror, that the Bishop hadn't recognized him.

On the thin wrinkled neck of the old man a vein started to throb. Then he spoke in a deep slow voice, like a gramophone which has not been properly wound up. "Yes . . . I know her . . . she made me the . . . winter coat. . . ."

"Put it down in the minutes, Comrade," ordered Penyige. "The old boy has confessed that she made him a winter coat. Not bad! As if there were no tailors in Szombathely!"

Szopor made a sign to one of the stenographers, who nodded. He continued questioning the bishop. "When and on whose instructions did you hand over the 486 dollars to Piroska Szabó?"

"For . . . for . . . her services."

"What sort of services?"

"The er . . . winter coat. . . ."

"What else?"

"I . . . I mean too . . . the other services. . . ."

"So you gave her 486 dollars out of this large sum which came through a special courier?"

The old man nodded. "Yes I . . . took it. . . ."

"486 dollars is quite a nest-egg. Not even the president of the United States himself has such an expensive winter coat. What sort of services did Piroska Szabó render you—to be rewarded in this way by the Holy See?"

"Many . . . many . . . services."

"Well, tell us one of them."

The bishop again dried his tears. His thin shoulders trembled. The nurse tapped him on the shoulder with his huge fist, "Don't be frightened, old man," he said. "Answer up properly!"

From the corner Comrade Penyige put in another word. "Well, you aren't suffering from any more intestinal complaints, are you? You needn't be afraid of having any more codliver oil. Answer the comrade properly."

The bishop still didn't reply. Szopor waved a sheet of paper in front of him. "Here is your own confession. You have confessed to it already. I ask you again. Why did you give a large number of dollars to Piroška Szabó? Anyway, who is this Piroška Szabó? What is her connection with you?"

The bishop winced, then he spoke painfully. "She . . . she is . . . my mistress. . . ."

"Not true! Not true!" cried the old woman, grabbing Páter Nádor's hands. "Father, don't let them make His Excellency tell such horrible lies! Oh, dear St. Martin, I wish a huge rock would crash down from heaven."

"Shut up, Piroška Szabó," ordered Szopor. "There is only one emotion Father Nádor can feel at this, I am sure. Disgust at such an obnoxious liaison. At this slough of filth in which you are living. Plenty of dollars, plenty of sex, eh? In the meantime, in the name of St. Martin, you help a foreign power to overthrow the régime of the People's Democratic Republic."

Piroška Szabó jumped up. "Dear St. Martin!" she cried. "Please send your armed angels. Please save us. Save His Excellency the dear Bishop."

Not the bones of the murderer, nor the two demons, nor the image of evil appearing as Venus, nor the bandits,

nor the Green Bird and the mad bat—not all these together had struck her with such horror as this one hideous, infamous lie forced upon His Excellency the Bishop.

“Stop screeching,” said Szopor, and he nodded to the Red Cross nurse, who took Piroška up in his great powerful arms and shook her in the air like a doll, afterwards depositing her in the chair again.

“Please, Comrade,” she whined, “please give me back my silver butterfly and let me go home.”

Szopor ignored her and continued addressing the bishop. “You, a highly placed Catholic priest, did not scruple to use money intended for other purposes for your mistress. So you swindled the Pope himself! You embezzled *his* money. Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

The old man took out his handkerchief again and blew his nose, at the same time muttering words from the Gospels. “We committed sins . . . we were unvirtuous . . . we committed crimes. . . . Have mercy upon us. . . .”

“Stop saying your prayers here! Answer properly! What was your intention when you taught Piroška Szabó all this rubbish about St. Martin?”

“Don’t answer, Your Excellency!” cried the old woman. “They put a five dollar note in the arm-chair of Mrs. Kuhinka. Not only in my sewing-machine. They’re setting a trap for you. They want to banish you too, Your Excellency, to the camp kitchen in Recsk.”

From the corner where Penyige sat came a loud guffaw.

“We won’t let you go home if you don’t keep quiet,” said Szopor to Piroška. To the bishop, he repeated the question, “You intended using St. Martin as a cover name, didn’t you? To conceal your elaborate conspiracy. That’s why you talked so much about him to your mistress.”

"Yes . . . that is . . . the reason . . . why I . . . talked about him," muttered the bishop.

"You were hoping to organize a prayer campaign in the imperialist West, weren't you? Under the pious cloak of St. Martin's name, you hoped to overturn Communism in Hungary?"

"Yes . . . I have been . . . organizing . . . a prayer campaign," mumbled the bishop.

"And you used St. Martin's name as propaganda? As the patron saint of the movement?"

"Yes . . . yes that . . . I used his name as propaganda."

"And with all these nursery tales you hoped to raise his political prestige?"

"Yes . . . hoped . . . to raise it. . . ."

"Well come on then. You admit all this. But let's hear it pronounced clearly, coherently."

"With nursery tales I have been raising . . . St. Martin's . . . political . . . prestige. With the help of . . . the dollars . . . to overthrow the . . . régime. To undermine it . . . sinfully. . . ."

"What else did you want to use the cult of St. Martin for?"

The bishop didn't answer.

"Well come on," said Szopor encouragingly. "It's clear that Piroska Szabó was an apt pupil. She learnt the stories well and you intended that she should repeat them, thereby ridiculing our leaders."

"Yes I intended . . . I . . . to ridicule."

"For instance, you ridiculed Mihály Ferkó, the comrade who lost his ears in the war. Who else did you make fun of?"

"Well . . . of . . . Mr. Penyige."

"Oh no, no . . . you didn't make fun of Comrade Penyige. But you incited everybody to destroy the communists. Kill even your own father if he is a communist,

you said. Is this compatible with the doctrines of the Catholic Church and with the cassock you are wearing?"

"It is compatible . . ." mumbled the bishop, "oh . . . no . . . yes . . . beg your pardon . . . no . . . I made a mistake . . . it is *not* compatible."

"Do you admit to having ridiculed the beards of Comrades Lenin and Marx?"

"Yes, I admit it. . . ."

"You taught your mistress that the communists were evil demons. You dared to say that Comrade Stalin appears sometimes in human flesh and sometimes in an animal's skin. Furthermore, that he sometimes inhabits the bones of the dead. Do you confess to having said all these things?"

"I confess . . ." winced the bishop.

"You threaten Budapest and Moscow with the atomic bomb. You slander and ridicule the most faithful son of the Hungarian people. You compare the May Day parade, the most wonderful annual celebration of the workers of the world, with the procession of the Goddess with the cow's head. You dare to state that the Soviet Union is a bloodthirsty bear. But you also state that it will suddenly be tamed and walk like a lamb, to pay a visit to the Pope in Rome. By this you imply, I suppose, that the peoples of the Soviet Union will soon rid themselves of Marxist Leninism—and, incidentally, sink back into the dark ages, where you would like them. The halving of St. Martin's cape is your more subtle way of telling the capitalist world that this is the best way to conquer Communism. Do you deny all this?"

The old man in the red skull-cap sat quietly, his head bowed on his chest.

"Perhaps you don't understand my question. Do you, I ask you, deny that you have taught all this to Piroška

Szabó? Do you dare to state that the aim of all these stories was not to overthrow the democratic order of this country?"

"No I . . . do not . . . dare not. . . ."

"Don't say it like that! Dare not! Or one of the witnesses here may think we have forced you to confess all this. Be straightforward. Do you deny the charges? Or do you admit they are true?"

"I . . . admit . . . they are true. . . ."

"Have you anything to say in your defence?"

After a long pause the bishop answered, "Yes . . . I have."

"What?"

"The thirty-seventh psalm . . . says, 'My God do not . . . rebuke me . . . in Your anger. My God,' he winced, as if trying to withhold his tears, "Do not threaten me in your . . . anger . . . because . . . your arrows . . . have penetrated . . . my flesh . . . And your hand . . . was hard . . . upon me. . . ."

At this point Professor Ballagó lost control of himself and began shrieking like a madman. "I can't stand it any more! I can't bear it!"

He had once screamed like this in Kaba, when he was working under the chief engineer. "Colleague Engineer," he had shrieked "I am a human being too!"

He jumped up and began running about the room wildly, his hands pressed to his stomach. "I can't stand it any more! I can't! I can't! I can't!"

"See him to the lavatory, Comrade," said Szopor, "but before letting him sit down, strip him."

The Red Cross giant put his hands on the archaeologist's shoulder and propelled him to the door. It rumbled open and closed behind them.

"Before the minutes are typed in triplicate and signed by the defendant and the witnesses," said Szopor, "I wish to make the following statement." He read from his notes :

"Piroska Szabó has denied all charges. Her colloquy with St. Martin was not, she claims, fictitious, nor taught her by the bishop. Yet the bishop himself has confessed that she is his concubine, and that he gave her money intended by the Holy See to support counter-revolutionary groups. These statements are contradictory. I call upon the bishop of Szombathely. Have you anything to add?"

The bishop rose unsteadily. "Nothing . . ." he quavered.

"And you, Piroska Szabó?"

"Yes I have, Comrade."

"What?"

"Well, this wretched old man here . . . he's not the Bishop of Szombathely. He's somebody else. You've exchanged him."

"That's another good story. Like the one about the Green Bird."

"But it's true, Comrade. Of course you can do what you like to me. I managed to live through the liberation. And I suppose I shall live through this. But nothing will ever make me tell lies about how St. Martin visited me. He came three times, and I shall repeat it until I die. I believe, too, that he will come a fourth time. And then this building we are in—or rather in its cellar—will be destroyed, as the white tower was in Ambozia. Come dear St. Martin, come down and free us all!" she implored.

Szopor appeared bored rather than annoyed by this.

"Really," he said getting up, "surely we've had enough of this childish stuff. I must go now." He made a sign to the stenographers, who quickly picked up their notes and pencils. "We'll leave the two clerical men together," he said as Penyige got up to join him. "They may want to talk together in private. Come with me," he said to Piroska Szabó.

As Penyige passed the bishop, he gave him a playful tap on the head, a deliberately sacriligious gesture, for he knew it resembled the laying on of hands at confirmation, a ritual privilege of bishops. "Don't be afraid old boy," he said, "you won't get another bath today."

As if to escape this visible and tangible world, the bishop buried his face in his hands, and remained in that position while the door opened and closed behind them. He and the priest were left alone in the room.

Páter Nádor looked first at the window, to see if they were being observed; then at the walls, the table, and every piece of furniture. He did it unconsciously, for he knew he was wasting his time. Microphones would register everything they said, and he would never find them however hard he looked. He turned to the bishop who sat quite still, his face still buried in his hands. He wanted to say, "Yes, Your Excellency, the finest drink in the world is the Riesling of Csopak. But you know, Your Excellency, you sometimes have to swallow a little vodka too. . . ." He felt that the bishop had, metaphorically, been forced to drink too much vodka, perhaps something even more powerful than vodka. He shifted his great bulk nearer the bishop, causing the chair to creak under the strain, and he respectfully touched his superior's cassock with his fingertips—the normal respectful gesture made to a priest officiating at High Mass. "Your Excellency . . ." he whispered.

The bishop made no reply. With bowed head, he mut-



tered something which the priest could not catch into his hands.

"Your Excellency," said Páter Nádor a little louder, "It is I, the unworthy servant of our Church, the parish priest Nádor, from Tiszadaru. . . ."

The Bishop of Szombathely mumbled something in Latin, which Páter Nádor recognized as the *Salve Regina*. In it the bishop described himself as an outcast son of Eve, and he was calling on the Mother of Mercy. "*Ad te clamamus exules filii Evae*". Feeling that it would be better not to continue holding the bishop's cassock, the priest made the sign of the Cross, and began praying too.

Their prayer would, he knew, be faithfully recorded by the microphones. But he felt sure that no harm could come of that, as it was one of the most common prayers in the Litany, in which the banished sons of Eve call on the Queen of Heaven "crying and sobbing from the valley of misery", asking her to turn her merciful eyes on them and show them Her Son Jesus. "*O clemens, o pia, o dulcis virgo Maria*". They repeated the last words of the prayer together. The bishop then placed his emaciated hands on his knees, and looked up pitifully at the priest kneeling beside him.

"Your Excellency," whispered Páter Nádor. "Give me some instructions. What can I do for you? Can I help in any way? *Within the framework of Church and State.*" He spoke the last words clearly and loudly, for the benefit of the microphones, at the same time looking meaningly at the bishop.

But it seemed that the bishop did not understand what he meant. Páter Nádor had hoped that he might have reached that state of determination displayed by the inn-keeper, Bálint Lepke, when he went down to the wine-cellar and burnt himself to death.

"Albigens," was all the bishop muttered.

"I offer you the services of a son of the Church, Your Excellency. *In the framework which the investigation provides.*" He again thought of the hidden microphones.

"Monothelet!" said the bishop louder pronouncing the name of a well-known heresy.

"Your Excellency, since the liberation I have done all I can to reconcile the rights of the Church with this . . . er . . . system. . . ."

"You are a worse traitor than Péter Valdo!"

The words came out for the first time sharply and violently, and Péter Nádor was overwhelmed with horror. The Bishop of Szombathely had compared him with the outcast chief of the Valdenses in the Middle Ages, a well-known heretic.

"As far as my humble position may contribute . . . in the circumstances . . ." he stammered.

The bishop interrupted him. "Monothelet!" he repeated. His right hand was raised as it had been when he came in, in a kind of admonitory blessing when the Péter had half-hoped that he might utter an anathema, as St. Peter had, and damn Comrade Penyige for his sins. He *had* uttered an anathema—but against himself, Péter Nádor!

"Don't forget the third Synod of Constantinople," cried the bishop his eyes blazing. He turned away from the priest, buried his face in his hands, and began praying again. "*Salve Regina mater misericordiae vitae dulcedo et spes nostra salve. . . .*"

At these words, Péter Nádor's two hundred and forty pounds of human flesh began quivering with fright, and he made no attempt to recite them with the bishop.

A quarter of an hour passed in this way, the bishop praying continuously aloud, while the priest remained

silent. Apart from his desire to leave the building, Páter Nádor had now only one faint hope—that His Excellency might include him in his prayers. He felt deeply humiliated. There was much that he still wanted to tell his bishop, but just when he had summoned up enough courage to speak again the bishop, as if aware of it, began mumbling even louder. The priest drew up his arm-chair to be close and then, determinedly, interrupting his superior in the middle of his prayers, he said, "Your Excellency, I must defend myself. Your Excellency's words have deeply wounded me. Concerning the third synod of Constantinople and the heretic Monothelet. . . ."

The bishop, who was not listening, went on praying.

"Your Excellency, I must then fit my words into Your Excellency's prayer, my poor unworthy words. I implore you to pray for me. For us all. Pray that the Lord may grant us wisdom. Pray that the Lord of Heaven, who according to the words of the Apostle Jacob, grants to each his due, will give wisdom to the Church and to its servants, as to me, an unworthy sinner. To each and all of us, individually. We have never been in such need of wisdom as now. The Rock of St. Peter is surrounded by huge angry waves which threaten to engulf us all. . . ."

The bishop looked up irritably for a fleeting second. "Albigens!" he uttered the awful word again.

"But, Your Excellency," implored the priest. "As a humble servant of God, in the name of Truth, I must be allowed to defend myself against this horrible accusation. I wanted to do good and serve the Church. Any mistakes I may have made should surely be regarded as those of every fallible human being. In these difficult times for the Church I know I have erred, but I have also tried to correct my errors. From the first days after the liberation, my association with the Government had only one aim, to help the Church. For a Church whose members do

not, or cannot, frequent it, is no longer a church. We had to come to some compromise. That was why I became a cabinet minister."

The word "cabinet minister" seemed to excite the bishop, for his expression suddenly became contorted with rage. It seemed that he would say something rude; but he evidently had thought better of it, for he lapsed back into prayer, his rosary rattling as he spoke: *Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes. . .*"

"Yes we had to come to terms with it," whispered Páter Nádor. "We had to come to terms with this godless world power. It would otherwise have destroyed us altogether. Tomorrow it may close all the churches, just as it has closed the church schools and monasteries. All our priests may be imprisoned. The flock will be without a shepherd."

"Monothelet!" repeated the bishop.

"We must look a hundred years ahead, Your Excellency, to a great huge pagan world power which will control the world. If we do not come to terms with it, it will destroy our churches completely. The splendid structure of our Christianity will disappear and our poor, unhappy country will be back where it was a thousand years ago. I did everything I could to mitigate government action against our church. And I am deeply offended by the harsh words of Your Excellency. You have likened me to the evil Albigensians"

"No! You are worse than them," snapped the bishop.

"But, Your Excellency, if the earthly cells of the body of Christ are annihilated, our prayers will stop and the community of the Church will be overthrown. The Holy Ghost will become a mere wandering autumn breeze. It will find no devout persons who pray to it. No rosebush that it can set ablaze. There will be no confessions of sins. If all are incarcerated in this building—as we are today

—where you have undergone such torments, our country will be a desert in the Egyptian darkness. . . .”

“I don’t mind,” said the bishop. These were perhaps the only words he had uttered which meant anything.

“. . . the bell towers will be dumb. The flocks of sheep will stray. Wolves will tear them to pieces. All this, Your Excellency, if we do not act, if we do not come to terms, if we do not swallow the vodka . . . which is, we must admit, offered in a most friendly way, Your Excellency.” While he spoke he had unconsciously approached the bishop and knelt before him on the floor.

But the bishop did not seem to hear his words, or to be aware of his nearness, for he went on praying again to the Mother of Mercy. He spoke in a low voice, lower than before, as if almost encouraging the priest to go on talking, almost as if he was one of his luncheon guests in the episcopal palace.

Páter Nádor now forgot the microphones and began imploring his superior loudly. “I agree, I may have made mistakes, Your Excellency. I am, after all, a fallible human-being. If everything is burned to ashes on the Danube and the Tisza by its ancient enemy the Devil, only the Holy Ghost can maintain the Church. The seeds sown today may bring forth fruit a hundred years hence. Perhaps Our Lord has placed us in this hostile world with a special mission. Perhaps this palm branch has been deliberately placed in our hands. Perhaps this explains why,” he put his arm comfortingly around the bishop, “I have found you today in such sad circumstances. My heart bleeds for you. My soul is tormented for you. I pray that the angels may give my lips the fire of eloquence, so that I can tell you that, although mortal and fallible, my soul is full of grief for you.” The Páter’s words became more and more anguished and repetitive.

“I implore God to enlighten me. I know I have made

serious mistakes. In your silence I read a reprimand. And you compared me with the Albigensians and the Valdians. It is perhaps true that I have been half-hearted in my Christianity, Your Excellency. I implore your help. Help me to see my mistakes. Please say something before it is too late. I remember some of Your Excellency's sermons. When you were ordaining priests in the Cathedral. You pronounced unforgettable words to these young priests. 'Now that I am an older man,' you said, 'I have learnt that I did not follow Christ properly in my youth. I have now gained a new faith.' And it is the same with me. I, too, have gained something new thanks to this ordeal. . . ." His voice failed and he could say no more. The great fat body shook as he sobbed, and tears ran down his cheeks. He stared hopelessly into the tortured face of the bishop, waiting for an answer. None came. Did he discern in the face of the bishop the torments of Bálint Lepke?

He began talking feverishly again. "Perhaps, Your Excellency, I was mistaken. Perhaps I made a mistake when I tried to help the Church to come to terms with the secular power. I did it in the hope that our Cardinal might be released. The Bishop of Kalocsa, too. I did it in the hope that the doors of the gaols might be opened. Perhaps that was not where my duty lay. Perhaps I should have followed the Lord wholeheartedly, with my body and soul, disregarding our tormented brothers. I should have ignored the Red Army completely. I should have fixed my eyes steadfastly on Golgotha, because . . . because, what is a priest anyway? He too is a crucified man. He is, or he should be, like good wholesome bread. Perhaps, Your Excellency, my greatest crime was that I could not achieve this. I was not good wholesome bread. Once in Ferrara I saw a painting about this bread, depicting the priest as a man eaten by his flock. The paint-

ing was called 'The Man who was Eaten'. Oh, Your Excellency, please, please, answer me! Do you not answer me because you consider me a traitor? Is that why you refer to Péter Valdo? Is my crime that I am not 'The Man who was Eaten'?"

The bishop was still motionless, staring ahead, not uttering a word. Only the veins throbbing in his neck showed that he was alive.

"Oh, Your Excellency, you reproach me, because I am not faultless. Because I lack the courage to try to be faultless. You think I do not observe the Lord's words. 'Do not fear persecution! Do not fear those who will kill your body! Fear only those who will bring you down to hell!' Oh, Your Excellency, I know all this only too well. I know I have not the courage to try and be impeccable. But not through lack of goodwill. A miserable wretched man—that is what I am. And the worms are already consuming my body. A man must have a whole body and a whole soul to be impeccable. Only in this way can he follow Jesus Christ completely. Yes, I know I lack something. But, Your Excellency, please, please, do not call me a Monothelet. And one thing more. Perhaps it was because I tried to be too clever that I became wicked. For years I have been thinking about what should be done for the reconciliation of Church and State. For the Church's benefit, of course. But I should have known that this sort of mundane reasoning is the contradiction of true faith. The saints did not reason, did they? That is why there are so few saints, and so many clever. . . . All the same I do not deserve to be reminded, wretched sinner that I am, of the third Synod of Constantinople and the heretics. . . . And please one thing more, Your Excellency. . . . Please, Your Excellency, pronounce the word which will set my mind at rest. Please, tell me you will not forsake me." He knelt again before the bishop.

But the bishop only buried his face in his hands and began praying again, out loud this time, in a soft musical singing tone, almost as if he understood the unhappiness in the great fat body kneeling before him.

Páter Nádor at last raised that huge body and slumped back in the chair. He made the sign of the Cross. Then he too began to murmur a prayer, the famous Latin words, "*et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende. . .*"

Somehow, it made him calmer, too, to utter Latin words.

4

The familiar subterranean rumblings were heard again, and the door opened, to reveal Szopor and the old woman. Penyige was behind them, with two grim looking men they had not seen before. As this group stood at the door, they reminded the priest of Rembrandt's famous painting of the faithless but penitent woman, with two soldiers beside her.

Piroska Szabó seemed calmer, and her face had the old chirpy, pigeon-like expression; but it was the expression of a very bedraggled pigeon, one which had been molested by children. She was smiling, and Páter Nádor wondered if during the two and a half hours absence she had been given more cherries. Or had she convinced them that St. Martin had really appeared that morning in the memorial garden? She was no longer wearing her yellow straw hat. Had she lost it? Or had they taken it from her?

Páter Nádor had been deeply wounded at the few words the bishop had spoken to him, and even more by the silence of His Excellency; and it annoyed him to see the old woman smiling. After all, it was she who had



landed them in all this trouble. He thought of the archaeologist's words when they had first seen her—that she looked like a “drenched rat, a sour cheesecake made out of tow-rope”. Professor Ballagó had said that a hen had more sense than this half-witted female. But something must have happened to her in these two and a half hours, because she walked in a curiously automatic way towards her arm-chair, strutting like a Prussian grenadier.

Penyige sat down at the desk beside Szopor. In his hand he held a small automatic revolver, the latest Russian model, ingeniously copied from an American revolver captured in Korea. He fingered it absently, as if bored, with the air of a man who has just won a hand of cards, and who, having nothing better to do, is toying with the first trifle he picks up.

Szopor laid the files on the desk and announced that he would call the other witnesses, Professor Ballagó and Dr. Kis. He pushed the lever of his microphonic apparatus and uttered a string of figures, rather as if he were enumerating the serial numbers on the confiscated dollar bills. He then spoke in low tones to Penyige, ignoring the bishop and the priest completely. Nor did he seem to be any longer interested in the old woman. The minutes of her interrogation had been completed, he seemed to imply. It only remained to sign them. And documents are of course more important than human beings.

The doctor now appeared, handcuffed and escorted by Vaszilij. He had a bruise under his right eye which made him look even more unkempt than ever. He also gave the impression of being more indignant and more stubborn. “What’s the point of hitting me, Comrade?” he asked indignantly. In spite of the bruises and the handcuffs, he seemed determined and in no way cowed—just like the statue, Páter Nádor thought, in the 15th of March Square in Budapest.

Szopor said something in Russian to Vaszilij, who, as efficiently as he had served the lemon squash, took hold of the doctor's wrist, clicked something in the mechanism, and the hands were released.

"Please take a seat, Comrade Doctor," said Szopor sweetly, indicating a chair.

But the doctor did not sit. With considerable self-confidence he walked about the room, as if he were still in charge of his lung clinic in Budapest. No one should dictate to him, he seemed to say. In the end he chose the seat in the corner where Penyige had been sitting before. He placed his hands self-confidently on his knees; but they were shaking.

The door opened again, and the tall figure of Professor Ballagó appeared. He was not handcuffed, but his face was deathly pale. Sometimes, when fear is great enough, a man becomes strangely calm. This at least was the impression he gave, calmer now than when they had last seen him.

The Red Cross nurse accompanied him to Szopor's desk, where he deposited a small blue diary. "We found this in his pocket, Comrade. He admits having eaten three pages."

Szopor picked it up and glanced at it cursorily; he appeared bored at having something new to think about. He was about to put it aside, when he evidently found a page of interest, which he showed to Penyige. They began to examine the diary more carefully, Penyige all the time dangling his Soviet-American revolver playfully.

Professor Ballagó had spoken earlier in the day about his coming rehabilitation. As he watched his most secret thoughts being divulged, he stood unhappily, as unhappily as he had stood that day on the Puszta of Kaba, when he had made the mistake with the theodolite.

Meanwhile, like a bass continuo in the background

the low-voiced mutterings of the bishop droned on. Only Páter Nádor knew that he was reciting the *Salve Regina*.

When they had finished looking through the diary, Szopor turned irritably to the archaeologist. "So you were known as Falstaff, were you? The man who shouts in the desert, preparing the way for the Americans?"

"Oh no, it's not my work," stammered the professor, "It was just a little . . . er joke. . . ." He was prepared for the worst, aware that a tyrant has no sense of humour, as well as no heart.

"Perhaps that was written too by England's imperial poet, whose friend was drowned at sea?" asked Szopor sarcastically.

The scientist only glared at him.

Penyige had been examining the diary thoughtfully, but he now suddenly tossed it aside into the corner. "We won't waste time on this rubbish," he said. "It has no bearing on the case."

"You are absolutely right, Comrade Penyige," said Szopor. "It has nothing to do with the case."

So that was the end of the "secret diary". Professor Ballagó reflected sadly that he need not have eaten those three pages. He felt more confident, and the colour returned to his cheeks, while the hope revived that he might finally get out of this catacomb alive and return to Budapest. Optimistically, he even saw himself back with his family in Budapest that evening. Perhaps next week he might be at work again in the Academy or in the Museum.

Comrade Szopor began reading the minutes of the interrogation, and they all listened attentively. The stenographers had done their job well. Piroška Szabó's long stories were repeated almost word for word, and none of the witnesses could complain that their statements had been distorted. Comrade Szopor recited the incident of St. Martin being beaten by the philistine, of the huge tree,

of the bandit's conversion and the intervention of the angels, all with the same monotonous but serious tone, as if he were lecturing a Party Seminary. He might have been reading aloud from Stalin's immortal works, those fundamental theses on the thoughts of Lenin.

Even the bishop listened closely, cupping his hands to his ears.

"He came to see me at night while I was asleep," read Szopor. "The ice was glittering on his beard as gems glitter on the rings of a rich man. Two angels stood beside him. . . ." When he came to the part where St. Martin shares his coat with Jesus Christ, the bishop suddenly came to life and said, "You really heard that, my dear child?"

"Ah!" cried Piroska, delighted at his kindly tone. "You see, he is still His Excellency the Bishop. He has not forgotten who he is."

Szopor continued reading sternly, ". . . and one day I will be with you in Sabaria, where you are today in torment. And the altars of the Prince will be demolished. And an angel will descend from Heaven crying, 'The great Babylon is overthrown! The shelter of evil, the house of the impure spirit, the nest of the Green Bird, all are destroyed'."

By the time he had finished the three stories, hours had passed and it was after midnight.

"Do you recognize your words," he asked Piroska.

"Certainly, these are the very words of dear St. Martin. It is as if I heard them all over again. Even your voice, Comrade, reminds me of St. Martin."

"You adhere then to your story that the sewing-machine told you all this? And you deny that the bishop taught it to you?"

"Please, Comrade, do not ask me to tell lies. Do not force me."

"We force no one here. We have even inserted a clause in the minutes which provides for your strange assertion." He read, "'I, Piroska Szabó, do hereby maintain my statements in the face of all the evidence the three original witnesses have produced to the contrary. I adhere to my statement that the dead St. Martin spoke to me, and his voice came from the sewing-machine by which I make my livelihood, in which I hid the money given to me by His Excellency the Bishop. . . .' Here, Piroska Szabó, is a fountain pen. Sign please."

Piroska Szabó walked stiffly up to the desk. "I will not sign about the money," she said determinedly.

"But you will sign about the rest?"

"Willingly."

"All right then. You can add in writing: 'I deny that I was given money by the bishop'."

"Of course." Then meticulously, as if she were about to take the measurements for a bodice, she signed her name, adding on each of the three copies that, in the name of St. Martin, she denied having accepted any money from the bishop.

Szopor seemed pleased and told her she could go now; a waiter would take her to the restaurant, where she could eat and drink what she liked.

"Thank you, Comrade," she said. "But I happen to have some left-overs from yesterday at home. Some stuffed turnips. I would rather go home and eat them there."

Szopor said something in Russian to Vaszilij who led her away. She strutted out as she had come in, with the same automatic, puppet-like movements.

Páter Nádor was baffled by the relative leniency shown towards her, particularly after her refusal to admit that she had received money from the bishop. They must have some very good reason for this. Soon it would be his turn

—that knight's move on the chessboard which Szopor had referred to earlier.

Szopor now dealt with the bishop's confession. The wording here was equally faithful to the original, except that most of it had been suggested to the bishop by Szopor himself.

"Bishop of Szombathely," he said grandiloquently, "You have heard your own words, in which you confessed that Piroska Szabó, a seamstress working in the private sector of industry, and your mistress, sewed you a winter coat for which you paid her four hundred and eighty-six dollars, out of moneys received from the Vatican. Furthermore, you confess to having taught your mistress these fabrications about St. Martin, with the intention of using his name to cover up a conspiracy against the State; that the conspiracy originated in the West, in the form of an apparently harmless prayer campaign, but which was to develop into an armed uprising supported by western weapons and money. As the inventor of all these stories about St. Martin, do you take full responsibility for the callous slanders against the international proletariat, against the cause of peace, the Soviet Union and the leaders of our Hungarian State? These St. Martin stories have one feature in common—they all refer to the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies as the Devil, and his attendants as demons. And you, as a Catholic bishop, regard it as your mission in life to destroy this so-called Devil and his demons, with the help of the Western imperialists? You have confessed all this. Will you sign the confession?"

In the silence that followed the old man seemed unable to speak. He bent forward in his chair as if trying to get up, but his strength failed him. He winced, cleared his throat, sat back, tried once again to speak, then stared helplessly at Penyige. With great difficulty, and with the

help of the nurse, he finally got to his feet and shuffled across the room.

"Please . . . may I . . . have . . . the pen . . ." he said in a low voice. He then signed all three copies of the minutes just as, Páter Nádor reflected, he would, not so long ago, have signed his episcopal circulars. The Red 'Cross giant then led him out of the room.

## Chapter VI

### *Páter Nádor is led into temptation*

#### 1

It was now the turn of the witnesses.

"Doctor Kis, kindly come forward. I am about to read your statement. The regrettable incidents which have happened to you in the past will have no bearing whatsoever on today's evidence. Do you agree with this?" He read :

"Doctor János Kis, after having heard the evidence, alters his earlier statement, in which he declared that Piroska Szabó was mentally defective and suffering from schizophrenia. The undersigned person now states that in his considered opinion the woman is sane and fully accountable for her actions and words. He was able during the taking of evidence to convince himself that she had ingeniously invented the stories about St. Martin, with the intention of misleading the examining authorities. She had been taught these stories, calculated to incite the citizens of Szombathely to revolt, by the Bishop of Szombathely. Having listened to all the evidence, Doctor János Kis declares that he heard the leader of these subversive activities, the Bishop of Szombathely, confess, of his own free volition, that he had organized, in the name of St. Martin, a revolt against the People's Republic, with



the aim of restoring the Hapsburg kingdom and the inhuman capitalist régime in Hungary. . . .”

“You agree with all this? Here is the pen. Sign please!”

“I have no intention of signing a list of lies,” said the doctor, and he scornfully grabbed the pen from Szopor and threw it on the floor. It might have been one of those inefficient People’s Democracy thermometers, containing no quicksilver, with which he had to make do in the hospital.

Szopor showed no signs of annoyance. “You have every right not to sign if you do not wish to,” he said. “Now please, be so kind as to withdraw.”

Dr. Kis made an amiable gesture towards the priest and Professor Ballagó, and went to the door. On the way, he turned to his interrogator and said, “I have learned today that there is only one possible way to behave—as a man. Good night, gentlemen. I shall now return to Budapest.”

“I am sorry,” said Szopor quietly, “but you cannot go to Budapest.”

“Why not?”

“We shall hold you until we have fully investigated the circumstances of the unfortunate operation you carried out in the hospital at Szolnok.”

So that was it! The doctor protested against this unfair stratagem, but it had little effect. One of the guards at the door seized him before he had said five words and thrust him outside.

Now, thought Páter Nádor, it is my turn, and he began to repeat the *Salve Regina* to himself.

But no. “Professor Ballagó,” called Szopor.

The scientist got up, prepared for the worst. As he approached the table he thought about his family and the kun-hills on the great Hungarian Puszta which he still

hoped one day to excavate. He was determined to sign anything that was put in front of him, and when he reached the desk he picked up the pen, waiting while Szopor read.

"‘When Piroska Szabó was in the memorial garden,’ read Szopor, ‘she said that the bishop had ordered all the priests of his diocese to pray night and day for the return of St. Martin. Professor Ballagó has stated that these priests are a party to the conspiracy against the Hungarian state. Further, he states that Piroska Szabó’s three stories have absolutely no foundation in fact. After hearing the bishop’s confession, he states that there can be no doubt that the whole St. Martin story is a fabrication aimed at overthrowing the Socialist order in Hungary. Furthermore, he agrees that they reveal the hand of their true author, the Bishop of Szombathely.’ Well here you are. That’s what you said. Now sign !”

Professor Ballagó had the pen in his hand and he went forward to the table. He could already see, in his imagination and memory, the kun-hills awaiting the excavations he hoped and longed to undertake. The few hairs that remained on his plucked eyebrow stood out like wires. He bit his underlip, as he often did when copying the designs of an antique vase.

He stared at the document. “I beg your pardon,” he said at last, “but this sentence here, it’s not quite right.”

“Which?”

“The old woman said nothing, either in the memorial garden, or here, about the priests of the diocese. At least I didn’t hear her say it.”

“But we heard it. Furthermore, Father Nádor heard it.” (The priest missed the opportunity to protest.)

Professor Ballagó suddenly felt a pang of envy for the “Lemurs” of Kaba. At this moment he would have gladly chosen to be a pianist in a café once again, to be a gold-

smith's assistant, to be a groundsman on the municipal tennis courts. Anything to get out of this place, without having to sign this odious document.

"Will you sign?" said Szopor.

"Please oblige me by omitting the sentence about the priests. A few minutes ago you were kind enough to omit the bit about the money the bishop is said to have paid Piroška Szabó."

Szopor almost lost his temper and began shouting. "You are a witness! Not a defendant! Don't you realize that?"

The last sentence had an unconscious irony, because the archaeologist was beginning to wonder exactly what he was.

"Well, something else," he stuttered. "I . . . to be frank . . . I'm not absolutely convinced that the . . . er . . . poetic fantasy of this lady could really cause a spirit of revolt. There seems to be some basic misunderstanding here. Some false assumption. Perhaps it results from two different points of view. It seems to me . . ." he thought for a moment, "like the collision of two express trains. Due to a signalman's error. And many people killed. . . . Yes, that's it! That's the right idea. We're all the victims of a serious railway accident. Not only us, but you too. All of us. And our children and grandchildren will realize the difficult problems we have to face."

Szopor was not much interested in this analogy, and Penyige appeared to be dozing.

"Well, Ballagó," said Szopor, "I'm sorry for you. In that case you will have to stay the night here."

"Me? Stay here? Why?"

Szopor only nodded to the guard, and scribbled something on a piece of paper which he gave him. The guard took Ballagó by the shoulders. "Come along, chum," he said, confidentially.

"But why? Why?" yelled Ballagó. "Please don't jump to conclusions. All that stuff in my diary. It's not by me. Not my handwriting. Someone else wrote all that stuff and put it in my pocket."

For answer, the powerfully built guard merely pushed him towards the door. When it opened Szopor shouted after him, "Who the bloody hell cares about your potty diary? It's unimportant anyway. It's the painting in Kief which you stole from the Soviet Museum that interests us. That's what you've got to answer for. And you'll remain here until you have."

The professor tried to shout back, "Somorov! Kief! Help! I'll obtain an official statement that I didn't steal it."

But no one listened to him. The guard gave him a kick which was so violent that he shot out of the door. Only three people now remained in the room, the two police officers and Páter Nádor.

## 2

Szopor turned to the priest, to whom he read the minutes of the interrogation in the same monotonous voice. Penyige had now given up playing with his revolver and placed it on the table. Was it a coincidence that its barrel seemed to be pointing in the direction of the priest?

Páter Nádor's heart was now thumping so irregularly that he could hardly follow the minutes. The words sounded so confused that he tried to imagine the type-script as if it lay on the table before him. But the words jumped up and down before his eyes as irregularly as his heart was beating, and behind them he saw other words, superimposed.

"The parish priest, József Nádor," recited Szopor,

"changed his mind several times until he finally realized that the stories of Piroska Szabó are pure fiction, not even dreams. . . ." He went on and the words came over to the priest in snatches. "Albigens . . . Monofizit . . . a worse traitor than Péter Valdo . . . Monothelet . . . third Synod of Constantinople. . . ." He took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead, wondering how he could get out of it all, how he could even survive. If only he had the scholiast's skill of St. Thomas!

"The said priest declares that the words of the seamstress are saintly rubbish and blasphemy. Nevertheless soon . . ." continued Szopor.

The priest thought of the logic and theology classes he had attended at the University of Budapest. "Logic," he remembered, "is the art of thinking clearly, methodically, accurately. . . ."

". . . the Parish priest Nádor had to admit that Piroska Szabó was speaking from a prepared text, which she had learnt parrot fashion. . . ."

The priest found himself thinking of the Latin wording of the scholiast, "*Ordinate et facilliter et sine errore procedat. . . .*"

"It transpired that the seamstress had learnt the stories about St. Martin in the Bishop of Szombathely's bed, a discovery which completely disillusioned the parish priest Nádor," continued Szopor.

"I must fight it out with them clearly, methodically, accurately. *Sine errore. . . .*" the priest told himself.

Szopor now came to the part where the priest had been left alone with the bishop. "Father Nádor declares that when they were alone, the treacherous bishop tried to persuade him, making use of the Latin language, to forward a criminal message to the Holy See, urging the intervention of the American imperialists. He requested that the same message should be forwarded to Constan-

tinople, the present-day Istanbul. When the witness showed no willingness to undertake this mission, the bishop branded him as a traitor, comparing him to Péter Valdo, the present Hungarian Minister for Education."

"*Logica vocatur rationalis non solum . . .*" the priest recalled the Latin words of St. Thomas, while a strange sensation ran through him, vibrating in his chest as if his heart was about to jump out of his mouth. He felt dizzy, and through the haze he heard words other than those pronounced by Szopor. They were words of encouragement, which came to him as if out of the ether, "You can't possibly sign that document, Jo," they said. He was amazed that he was addressed by his christian name. Whoever called him Jo evidently knew that he had been baptized with the name of the first-born son of Jacob and Rachel, the name too of the holy carpenter, the husband of Mary. The voice did not say, "Joseph", but "Jo" his nickname in the family and among his intimate friends. To everyone else he was Father Nádor.

Szopor continued, "'and finally the witness is prepared to agree that the bishop admitted his culpability with his mistress, Piroska Szabó. He is prepared to give evidence in front of the competent authorities about this.' Now here is the pen, Nádor. If you sign this, we will send you for the night to the Grand Hotel Sabaria. A room has been reserved where you can have a good night's rest. Then you can travel back to Tiszadaru or to Budapest tomorrow."

The priest looked at the pen which Szopor held out. It must be an American pen he thought, brand new. The nationalized stationers in Hungary did not sell such fountain pens. Confiscated no doubt at the frontier. In the priest's mind, as well as in every tissue of his fat monstrous two hundred and forty pounds, there now welled up one

all-possessing dominating urge, to get out of here as quickly as possible and go to the Grand Hotel.

"What's the trouble," said Szopor.

"The text is not concise," Páter Nádor thought of the famous syllogism, "Human beings are mortal. Peter is a human being. Consequently Peter is mortal."

"In what way?"

"It is illogical."

"Why is it illogical?"

The priest was annoyed with himself. A second ago he was sure he could use this type of syllogistic argument in which the Catholic Church is so well versed—based on the assumption that somewhere there must be a mortal called Peter.

"Come on!" said Szopor.

"I protest against the way you have set it out."

"Please be specific."

"His Excellency the Bishop mentioned the third Synod of Constantinople. There was no question of my taking a message to Constantinople. Consequently, I cannot endorse this passage."

"But he wanted to send a message to the Holy See. I heard him say so myself. The walls have ears here, you know."

Again to the priest came the second voice he had heard before. "You can't allow that, Jo!" After nearly a minute's pause he said, "His Excellency the Bishop did not even mention the Holy See. Consequently your walls could not have heard him say it. And he did not say that he wanted to send a message to the Holy See."

Here Penyige interrupted. "I heard him say it with my ears. If you go on denying this, you'll find yourself cited as an accessory to the crime."

The shrewd little eyes of the priest blinked behind his glasses. Another excellent syllogism occurred to him. "Des-

cartes is a philosopher. Philosophers are not angels. Therefore none of the angels are Descartes."

He looked at the revolver which lay on the table beside Penyige, and then again at the American pen. The two police officers waited patiently. He had to admit that they were polite enough to him, which was more than could be said for their treatment of the doctor and the archaeologist.

"Gentlemen," he said at length, "let us talk plainly. Since the day we were liberated, I have been working unceasingly with the Red Army and the Communist Party to rebuild our new democratic Hungary. The Comrade Lieutenant-General of the Ávo, who is your respected chief, is a personal acquaintance of mine. I might even say a friend. I will here and now send him a telegram drawing his attention to the errors of interpretation and, if I may use the word, of accoustics, which have misled you here. As I have said, His Excellency the Bishop and I never once referred to the Holy See. I give you my word of honour that I will wait in the Hotel Sabaria for Comrade Lieutenant-General's answer. After the necessary amendments, to which I know he will agree, I shall duly sign the minutes as required."

At this reference to their chief, Penyige changed his tone. "In the eyes of the Comrade Lieutenant-General to whom you refer," he said, weighing his words, "you are a nobody. You're nothing. You are merely tolerated in Tiszadaru. You have betrayed the Party line. To quote the words of the Lieutenant-General himself, you are nothing but a 'lousy little clerical bedbug'. I don't see him hurrying to send you any telegram."

"Ah," said the priest to himself, "now things are changing. Now I shall have to take care. Or they will start using force." But he continued imperturbably, "Gentlemen, while I was a cabinet minister I had the opportunity



of observing matters very closely, I can tell you. I am well aware that you have had a long trying day while preparing the witnesses. Or should I say enlightening the witnesses. About His Excellency the Bishop.

Instead of witnesses he wanted to say "actors", for he knew that, at the trial of His Excellency the Bishop of Szombathely (which would include St. Martin), everyone would have a carefully prepared role to play. The doctor and the archaeologist were clearly doomed for this, but he had hoped that he might somehow escape it. Somehow, with the aid of his Catholic training and casuistry—"therefore none of the angels can be Descartes"—he had hoped to escape.

"Gentlemen! Comrades!" he said amiably. "I think you will agree that the signature of two witnesses is sufficient. I have no doubt that Dr. Kis and Professor Balagó will sign the minutes. Why have three, when two will do? Too many cooks spoil the broth. I entirely agree with you gentlemen . . . er . . . comrades . . . that we must prevent the overthrow of our democratic achievements and punish the criminals. But please, dear friends, do not charge a pickpocket with murder. Anyway, you already have the wretched woman's signature. What more do you want? Anyway, I am perfectly prepared to sign too, what she has signed. Furthermore I will endorse everything I heard here with my own ears today—everything that His Excellency the Bishop has said, which has been faithfully transcribed by your stenographers. Such undeniable statements, clearly pronounced in this room, provide you, my dear comrades, with ample material for proceeding with the trial of St. Martin."

"We do not accuse the dead," said Penyige dryly, "only the living. As long as they live."

"Well then, my dear comrades, please let me endorse only the essentials, bearing in mind my conscience as a

priest. All I ask is for one or two . . . er . . . stylistic corrections to be made here and there in the minutes. Only a few."

Szopor and Penyige exchanged significant looks.

Ah, that's a good sign, thought the priest to himself.

But at this moment he heard another faraway voice speaking to him. This time it did not say, "Don't sign it, Jo". It whispered, "You're small fry, Páter Nádor. You're no longer a person of any importance. You can't harm anyone by signing all that. Go on sign it!" It gave him great satisfaction to think that he was only "small fry".

"I'm no-one, comrades, I know," he said. "I may have some small local importance in my parish, but I can't possibly affect the main stream of events. Of that I am well aware. Perhaps I may have had an adverse effect on socialism locally, but it can hardly have any bearing on the great popular movement which is carrying it forward. I cannot affect the prosperous humane future we all see before us. As Comrade Szopor said earlier, there is really no common ground between Church and State today. What can a small person like myself do to damn this great stream of human progress? I would not attempt such an absurd action. Both my common-sense and my feeling for historical necessity say to me, 'Yes sign these minutes', and I shall do so with the few necessary alterations of style to which I have referred."

"Shake the pen a little," said Szopor, as he gave it to the priest. "The doctor dropped it on the floor and it doesn't flow very well now. Sign your name here. And here. And here. Three times. Then we'll send you off for your night's rest to the hotel."

"Yes, you are small fry," repeated the voice in the priest's ear. "If you resist you will disappear without trace in the great socialist avalanche."

But at that moment, as he was about to take the pen, he heard another voice, the first voice which had addressed him as "Jo". "Don't sign, Jo! Whatever you do, do not sign. You'll regret it," it said. He stood before the paper pen in hand, staring ahead. Then he put it down. "There is a God in the heavens above, gentlemen," he said flatly. "I will not sign these minutes in their present form."

3

"Well then I'm afraid there will be no night in the hotel for you," said Szopor.

Now that he had decided, the priest was so relieved that he suddenly felt lighter, physically. His two hundred and forty pounds seemed to weigh less, and at the same time all his combative and argumentative powers came back to him. "You can't keep me here," he said. "My case bears no resemblance whatsoever to those of the doctor or the archaeologist. You may accuse someone of causing the death of a patient by negligence. Or of rifling a museum. Such charges cannot be levelled against me. By the way, have you heard of the theory of the threefold identity?"

"Stop all this beating about the bush," said Szopor. "You're wasting our time."

But the priest went on imperturbably, quoting Latin. "*Quae sunt eadem uni tertio . . .*" he said gaining confidence. "You see, had I killed a patient or stolen from a museum, well, then I would be the third person in the three identical cases defined in this way. Do you get my point? Or shall I explain it more clearly?"

"Ah!" said Szopor turning over the files in search of something.

The priest continued, "If two things are identical with

a third, then they are identical with each other. *Sunt quoque eadem inter se!* However, as you have heard, my case does not come into this category. My honour, my cassock, my conscience forbid me to commit a civil crime. So please be so good as to escort me to a taxi. Then I can go to the hotel."

Szopor was looking very carefully through the files. He found what he wanted, and began reading aloud. "József Nádor, Roman Catholic parish priest. Born in Bácsalmás, the 5th April 1896. Mother's name Júlia Kele. Any private means?"

"None," said the priest.

"Ah yes," said Szopor, reading half aloud. "This priest was much concerned about his financial holdings in Switzerland. In 1906, while a cabinet minister, he managed to smuggle several thousand Swiss francs out of the country. He did so, it is believed, as a precaution in the event of having to flee the country. . . ." He looked up inquiringly, while the priest stuttered out an indignant denial.

But it was true! He *had* done it. As he denied it, he said to himself, "There's nothing wrong in lying to the Devil." It made his flesh creep to think what they might know. But could they prove it? To his relief, Szopor went on turning over the pages, content evidently to leave the subject.

"What were you doing in Debrecen on the 16th July?" he asked suddenly.

"Debrecen is a Calvinist town with a Catholic minority. I was visiting the parish priest who is a friend of mine."

"And you also visited the Déry Museum?"

"You've already asked me that once. I told you I did."

"What did you do in the museum?"

"I went to see the *Ecce Homo*, Munkácsy's famous biblical painting."

"Were you alone?"

"Yes, I was alone. But what does that matter?"

"It does matter," said Szopor quietly, "because we intend to illustrate the threefold identical theory you have been babbling about. Your case is very like Professor Ballagó's. Also, to some extent, like that of the doctor."

"Well, I shall be delighted to hear you prove it," said the priest with some self-satisfaction, for he was sure that these men had never heard of the word syllogism.

"Your case resembles Professor Ballagó's in that, in both cases, damage was caused in a museum."

"Damage in a museum? You accuse me of damage?" the priest was flabbergasted.

"Stop pretending to be so innocent. We know all about you. According to our information, on the 16th July 1951 there were few visitors in the Déry Museum on account of the intense heat. You thought no one saw you, but there was, in fact, one eye-witness, who states that a fat priest came in surreptitiously and proceeded to do obscene things with a pin to the painting of a naked women. In the place, naturally, where one would expect a sexual maniac to put a pin. By the time this witness had called the guards, the priest had disappeared. Now we know who the fat priest was."

"This is slander!"

"I'm sorry, but we can't let you go until the whole matter has been investigated. I am referring, of course, to the placing of the pin. So you see, both you and the doctor committed crimes, one medical, one obscene. Here then is your threefold theory."

Penyige, who had been listening to this with great satisfaction, turned on the priest. "Answer that one if you can," he said.

Páter Nádor was completely crushed. The only words

he found to utter were, "My enemies do slander me."

Szopor now appeared to have lost interest in him, because he gathered up his files and left the room without even saying good-bye, the door opening, as usual, automatically in front of him. The priest was left staring vacantly ahead at the scarred forehead of Penyige. He was unable to think, he felt so dizzy; his fat body was vibrating, heart, lungs, liver all protesting tremulously against this monstrous accusation.

Penyige nudged him in the back with his pistol. "Get a move on, you old hypocrite," he said. "I haven't Comrade Szopor's good manners."

To be alone in the room with this man was most unpleasant. He remembered the cringing manner of the bishop before Penyige. He did what he was told as quickly as his bulk would allow, and moved over to the door, making at the same time a barely audible asthmatic moan. If there was one thing he intended to preserve it was his dignity.

They walked into the subterranean corridor outside, still lit with the colour and glow of an artificial Balaton sunset, exactly as it had been when they arrived. The passage smelt of fresh mortar, and there were some rusty iron girders and concrete beams lying on the floor. There was an atmosphere of humidity about the place which recalled some cellars he had once visited full of rats. He walked a little in front, until Penyige suddenly said, "Stop! We have come to a part which it is better for you not to see. It is not for people with weak nerves." He pulled a scarf out of his pocket and handed it to the priest. "Tie it over your eyes."

As he obediently blindfolded himself, Páter Nádor recalled the figure he had seen stumbling past in the window early that afternoon, also with its eyes bandaged.

He knotted it clumsily, as he remembered having last done many years ago, when he was a child, at Bácsalmás, playing blind man's buff. Penyige saw his hand trembling and helped him. He knotted it tight behind the head. Then he pushed the priest forward. "Go on. Don't be afraid. I'll show you where to go."

He took hold of the podgy hand of the priest, who waddled uncertainly in front.

"You have slandered my integrity," muttered the priest. "The integrity of a priest. . . ."

"Get a move on, and don't babble. Or you'll get a bullet up your arse."

The two hundred and forty pounds of fat tried to accelerate, the two hands groping out in front, as if giving a blessing. Suddenly he hit his foot against something and stumbled and someone behind gave him a violent push; he fell headfirst down what seemed to be a flight of stairs. Behind him he heard Penyige shrieking, "There you are! Stop there! And if you come to your senses, just call for me. Just call, 'Comrade Penyige, I'd like to have a drink with you.' You'll soon be free then." At this point, lying prone on the floor, Páter Nádor lost consciousness. . . .

How long he lay there he did not know, but when he came to his first thought was quite automatic. "I must hurry if I am to be in time for Mass." His eyes were still bandaged so that he did not know he was in the dark; nor was he yet conscious of the cuts and bruises caused by the fall.

"It's the third Sunday in Lent," he said to himself thinking of his flock. He put his hands to his eyes. Why was it so dark? And why was he still wearing glasses? Normally, he slept without them. He tried to turn over to the other side as one does in bed, hoping for another half hour's sleep. The sharp twinge of pain this caused

him brought him to his senses. He put forward his fingers, and instead of the silk eiderdown on his bed he touched something humid and slimy. "Am I dreaming? Am I dreaming that I have to say Mass," he kept repeating in his mind.

But Mass was over long ago. Lent was over. Easter was over. Yes, the "roses of Whitsuntide" were already blooming in his garden, he remembered. But automatically he went on murmuring the first words of the *Introitus* in the High Mass: "*Oculi mei semper ad Dominum quia ipse evellet de laqueo pedes meos. . .*"

Then, together with these Latin words he found himself pronouncing another quite meaningless sentence, "Descartes is not an angel". Horrified, he asked himself if he had gone mad. But he went on automatically murmuring the "entrance song" of the third Sunday in Lent: "*Respice in me et miserere mei, quoniam unicus et pauper sum ego. . .*"

By now he was certain that he had said High Mass this year. Yes, he was sure of it. The Mass including the sentences about the first born son of Jacob and Rachel, "I turn my eyes continually towards the Lord because I know He will free the shackles from my feet. . . ." "Oh Lord! Where am I?" he cried aloud. He then realized that one of the lens of his glasses was missing. Moreover—he touched something wet on his face. Tears? Or blood? Then he slowly began to remember. The past twenty-four hours came back in episodes. Yes, only a minute ago the fair-haired IBUSZ girl was saying, "Over there is the valley of Barát. Surrounded by rocks. It is one of the beauty spots in our socialist country." Then two men argued about swallows and frogs, and another with a red face spoke of the inn in Óbuda, and the intellectuals discussing the good vintages. Then someone talked about Emperor Claudius's statue, which was to be



excavated. Suddenly, in a flash, he realized. "Yes, they have thrown me down a deep well. Just like Joseph, who was thrown into a well by his brothers."

As he slowly regained consciousness, he remembered Piroska Szabó's words. "Do you like tea or coffee?" What was that tinsel dress she had been sewing for the wife of Comrade Kukorica? And then, when it all came back to him, he cried, "Help! Help!" He remembered the pins. Ah, that was another of their lies, that he had defaced the painting of the nude woman. Worst of all, he then remembered that the bishop had compared him to the Albigensians. He began quoting the *Tacitus* in the High Mass, the imploring words of Joseph when he had been thrown into the pit: "*Ad te levavi oculos meos qui habitas in coelis. Miserere nobis Domine miserere nobis. . .*"

But quickly, even as he recited this, other words came into his mind, those of Penyige just before he lost consciousness. "Stay there, and if you come to your senses call for me. Just call, 'Comrade Penyige, I'd like to have a drink with you.' You'll soon be free then."

This thought reassured him. Then he heard a voice somewhere above; he looked up hopefully and saw a small gleam of light. He was still only half conscious and thought he saw an angel descending to save him. God had heard his prayers. He remembered it had been an angel who came to St. Peter in prison, to release him. Then a great light had appeared above, and the angel had said, "Arise, gird yourself, take your shoes and staff and follow me." St. Peter's shackles had fallen as he passed through the gate beyond the second set of guards. And the iron gates of the prison had opened.

He heard the voice above again. After thinking about St. Peter, it seemed odd to hope that this angelic voice would now summon a taxi and take him to the Grand

Hotel Sabaria. It spoke in quite another way. "The monopoly capitalist gentlemen are not interested in the misery of the exploited classes," it said. "Yes, Comrade, I read only recently that an American senator complained that children in West Virginia and Kentucky were being starved to death." He recognized the deep, harsh tones of Penyige's chain-smoker voice.

"Should I tell him I would like a drink?" he asked himself.

Penyige was eloquently explaining to Szopor, or perhaps to the Red Cross giant, that monopoly capitalism spreads unemployment while real wages diminish and prices rise accordingly. "That is why America will fall into our lap like a rotten apple," he said.

The priest knew that if he uttered the magic words for a drink with Penyige, he would be free. Penyige would then surely admit that it had all been an unfortunate misunderstanding. Of course he would apologize for this episode in the pit, and for the joke in the worst possible taste about the pins being put into the naked woman. Then he, Páter Nádor, would sign the minutes. They were directed against the bishop of course but anyway, why shouldn't he sign? Why not? He was of no importance himself.

Upstairs he heard Penyige still talking about the bourgeois colonialists. . . . "Yes, Chiang Kai Shek is one of the most repulsive figures of contemporary bourgeois society," he heard the big Red Cross nurse agreeing.

Here in the pit also two voices were talking to him. One said repeatedly, "Jo, don't sign!" The other said, "You're only of small importance. What you can do here will have no effect. So shout for a drink, for heaven's sake. Tell Penyige you want to talk to him. Then he'll get you out of this ghastly place. You, of all people, don't want to be a martyr. Martyrdom wasn't meant for you,

Páter Nádor. The crown of the martyrs wouldn't suit you. What you need is a steak *à la Esterházy* and a glass of Csopak Riesling. Overcome your vanity, and don't try to compete with great men. Self-abasement is what you need, Nádor. Is there any greater self-abasement than to implore Penyige on your knees to give you a drink? Yes, self-abasement for the ugly sins committed during your lifetime, that's what you need. Look at His Excellency the Bishop. Let him be an example. He inclined humbly before Penyige and signed everything. And the self-abasement is really before the Lord God. The Lord God saves those who humble their hearts. He will save you too, Páter Nádor. Otherwise you will find yourself on a gigantic millstone where all the little grains are ground to dust. Yes, there's only one way out. Self-abasement. Come on then! Sign it! Sign it!"

In spite of this barrage of advice, he still could not bring himself to utter the words about the drink. Yet his bishop, by signing the minutes, had surely indicated that he should. Indeed, was that not practically an order from him to sign? Yes, he was sure that if His Excellency the Bishop were to see him now, here in this pit, he would say, "Yes, sign!"

"This is his silent order to me," he muttered tearfully. "*In petto*, this is his advice." He spoke as if he were praying, unconsciously using the Italian term of dogmatic theology. Yes, he had reached the point where he felt he must obey the orders of His Excellency the Bishop *in petto*. Perhaps by signing the trial of St. Martin would be hastened too. The free world would then learn with horror that a saint was being put in the dock in Communist Hungary. Then the reaction would set in, and public opinion all over the world would begin to move. Then . . . who knew what might be the result? Perhaps Hungary might join the Marshall Plan!

While all this was going on confusedly in his mind, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his side. So great was it that he found himself shrieking "Oh . . . Ah . . . Oh . . . Aouh!"

No one upstairs took the least notice. Penyige was still talking about 960 million people in the Socialist camp all struggling to defend peace.

He wondered how they would extricate him from this pit. It wouldn't be easy. Perhaps with a rope around my waist, he thought. Then, he thought, he would return to Budapest at once. He wouldn't waste time in the Grand Hotel of Sabaria. In Budapest, he would immediately ask for an interview with his old friend, the ex-tailor Lieutenant-General, and he would explain to him exactly what had happened, how harshly he had been handled, in spite of his innocence. He would tell the Comrade Lieutenant-General of the shameful mis-statements which had been incorporated in the minutes, and that he had signed them simply because he had been manhandled and thrown into a deep pit. The Comrade Lieutenant-General had been very friendly with him in the past. He remembered, in particular, an agreeable summer evening in 1903, in the garden of the Budapest Artists' Club. Here, he had seen beautiful actresses and eaten wonderful food. (Outside in the streets were dead horses and the remains of German tanks.) The Lieutenant-General, who was chief of the political police, loved to visit this club; on that occasion he had begun paying ardent court to a fashionable young blonde actress. While doing so he had sneezed and taken a handkerchief out of his pocket.

"What's the matter, Comrade, is your nose bleeding?" the actress had asked, seeing blood-stains on the handkerchief.

The Lieutenant-General had laughed and said, "An

hour ago I was interrogating the former Prime Minister of Hungary."

Upstairs Penyige was still explaining that 614 million people, the entire population of the imperialist bloc, was constantly diminishing owing to poverty and unemployment.

"Yes," said the priest to himself reassuringly, "You can't leave your parishioners in the lurch in Tiszadaru. The chaplain of Dada undertook to stand in for me for three days, but it is now my duty to return to my flock. So sign the minutes." Then he yelled with all the power in his lungs, "Comrade Penyige."

In the dim light at the head of the stairs he saw a head appearing.

"Well, so you've come to your senses at last?" said Penyige. "Do you want to have a drink?"

Then suddenly again, as if St. Martin himself had intervened, the priest could not utter the necessary words. He tried to, but not a sound came out. He heard the steps moving away and tried to yell again. But at this moment, the voice which had always been persuading him not to sign came to him. "Shame on you, Jo," it said. "Instead of calling on the Lord for help, you call on Penyige. That is why you are being punished. Accept your penance. As Joseph accepted being thrown down the well by his brothers. With humility and patience."

Páter Nádor found himself uttering the prayer of the Penitents aloud. He remembered all the sins he had committed while he was a cabinet minister, and he beat his breast while he prayed aloud. He thought of the time when he was a cabinet minister and had not asked for money for the persecuted priests. It had been difficult, because it was not really the affair of his Ministry. He thought of the priest who had been ingeniously tricked into making statements in his own confessional, by a

secret policeman dressed as a nun. But chiefly, here down in this cellar, he thought of the old parish priest called Kada. This man, too, had asked for his help—a small enough thing really, and he could have supported him. Kada had implored him to use his influence to have the village well, which was in front of his house, filled in, and another opened elsewhere. Otherwise, he said, he could not go on.

“Why can’t you go on, you old ass,” Páter Nádor had said. And then the old priest explained. “Every night a car stops outside for water, sometimes two or three cars. They wake me up, and I always imagine that they are police-cars which have come to arrest me. I now hardly sleep at all. It can’t go on. I tell you it can’t go on. For heaven’s sake have the well filled in.”

But Páter Nádor had done nothing. The result was that poor old Father Kada went off his head, sang American pop songs in front of the high altar, and one day cut off his own ear.

Páter Nádor had reproached himself continually for this. He could easily have ordered the well to be filled in. “Yes,” he muttered to himself half-aloud, “Old Kada tore his ear off because of a well. And now here am I, at the bottom of a well! Oh God, now I know I too am surrounded by demons and philistine. I hear the dogs barking at me. Yes, I know that the cow who gored that coachman in the monastery in Gaul is now looking down on me in this darkness. They’re all there watching me. The lepers and the dead Salfa. That villain on the high road to Vienna. They’re all after me. Oh St. Martin, you crushed the idols in Gaul. But I am crushed by Comrade Penyige. Please, I beseech you, protect me from him now.”

Then he thought that His Excellency the Bishop was listening to him, and he was ready to repent for all his

sins. This thought alone suddenly gave him peace of mind. "Ah now, yes wisdom is descending upon me," he cried, "as it descended on Joseph in the depths of the well. *Descenditque cum illo in foveam!*" he cried aloud the words of the Holy Mass for the Martyrs.

But this spiritual consolation did not last long, and his body soon began to assert itself. He groaned in pain. But no relief came. Not a sound was heard above. Neither angels nor demons descended to save or damn him. They simply left him here, half conscious, shivering from the cold, like the ragged beggar on the shores of the river Szombat.

"St. Martin," he implored again, "cover me with your cape! Give me that protection at least. . . ." Then he lost consciousness again.

When he regained it and found himself still at the bottom of the well of despair, he struggled to his feet. He made a few uncertain steps and began dancing. He put his hands to his ears and began to tear at them, as if he wanted to pull them off. Then he began to chant, "Yes, yes, yes, Comrade Penyige. Yes, let's have that drink together."

## *Chapter VII*

### *The Red Cultural Bus*

The inhabitants of Szombathely would never forget the first cultural bus which arrived from Budapest that sunny morning in June, that beautiful summer morning with hardly a cloud in the sky. After the official reception there was much coming and going in the memorial garden, where the main topic, as elsewhere in the town, was the arrest of Piroska Szabó. Most people knew her, especially the devout who regularly attended mass in the cathedral.

The youth of the province had come in large numbers to see the hexagon of Jupiter, and the other remains of the ancient capital, Sabaria. Among them were elementary schoolchildren, chattering like sparrows, led by under-nourished, nervous school-mistresses, shod in tattered sandals, who showed little interest in the excavations. Instead, they showed their bad temper at having to give up their Sunday morning, on the one free day of the week, to accompany their charges, catching at them savagely when they went astray, snatching at the pigtails of the more mischievous and noisy little girls.

Towards midday, a group of students from the Nagy Lagos and Sabaria gymnasiums arrived carrying red flags and accompanied by teenage girls from the Zrinyi Ilona Street school. They too seemed uninterested in the marble head of the Emperor Commodus, and anyone who heard the excited whispers as they flirted would have learnt



that the main topic in the memorial garden was still Piroska Szabó.

The pupils from the music academy were also there, and when the nostalgic notes of the cathedral bells chimed at midday, they formed a group in front of the statue of Jupiter and sang the jovial, carefree choruses of Soviet partisan songs. Other groups of girls wearing peasant snoods, from the Gyöngyös neighbourhood, sung the praises of Stalin equally enthusiastically. Some were students from the National School for Nurses, where they had been learning the elementary duties of their profession, so that they could take over from the nuns who had been expelled from the hospital. These girl nurses had left their patients behind on this important day, with the promise that they would tell them all about the excavations on their return.

The congregation which had just attended High Mass came out of the Cathedral through the memorial garden, pretending not to notice what "Socialist archaeology" was doing in these religious precincts. Their expressionless faces revealed more ostentatiously than they knew their loathing for the statue of Jupiter and everything connected with it—as if Pannonia and its treasures had never belonged to the Roman world, but was standing there revealed today simply to glorify the "new Roman Empire", the Soviet Union.

The cultural bus from Budapest which had been built for Mao-Tse-Tung stood lifeless, like some great stranded whale, waiting to engulf its tourists again. The doors were closed, the windows were shut, and in the midday sunshine the five-pronged Soviet Star, with the inscription in capital letters "Cultural Journey", sparkled on its radiator. Neither the driver nor the fair haired busz girl were to be seen; and the three official leaders, with the Party insignia in their buttonholes, who had been greeted

so ceremoniously in Veszprém by the grey-faced local bureaucrats, had also disappeared. The guide who had asked Páter Nádor, Dr. Kis and Professor Ballagó to come with him to the police station that morning, with Comrade Szopor and Piroška Szabó, had conveniently found that he had an appointment somewhere else in the town. Nor could one see his companion, the young man with the carnation buttonhole. He had left the memorial garden long before.

Not long after the cathedral bells had stopped pealing, a police car arrived full of blue-hatted Ávo men carrying sten-guns. They quickly emptied the memorial garden and began roughly interrogating anyone they disliked or suspected. One of the women teachers was kicked, and they tore the white scarf off a student nurse. Their brusque arrival recalled one of those socialist realist paintings, depicting Cossack cavalry dispersing hungry women and children crying for bread in Czarist times.

The women teachers were delighted to leave the memorial garden, and thus avoid having to make their pupils recite partisan poems. The professors and gymnasium teachers were also not sorry to escape the blue Ávo; it was particularly degrading to be bullied and harassed by men who could not even speak Hungarian, "Freedom fighters" from Greece, Korea and French Indo-China, foreigners who had been trained in the local police and security service. The students, too, were glad to get away to the football match between the Szombathely "Cotton Industry" team and Pápa "Advance", which they had been instructed to forego in the interest of "culture".

Within a matter of minutes the memorial garden had been emptied, and a Mongolian-faced guard stationed outside the gates with instructions not to allow anyone in until further orders. Some children ran along the main street with the news that the Ávo had locked the gardens

because "something had happened". What this "something" was, no-one of course knew—it was secret, as everything is in a land where it is a capital offence to laugh at official vigilance or spread panic stories. But public opinion quickly realized that something had happened among the statues. Some people whispered that the statue of Jupiter was a fake, which had only just been discovered. But soon they all knew that there was a close connection between the arrest of Piroska Szabó and the closing of the garden.

"I was there. I heard what she said."

"Me too."

"I heard everything."

"She didn't really say anything very wrong. Only that St. Martin still looks after us."

Someone started the rumour that the fat priest who had accompanied her to the police station was not a priest at all, but a policeman in disguise. The news quickly spread that the little seamstress had been right. Jupiter's statue bore about as much resemblance to Jupiter as a beetroot to a begonia. Anyway, Jupiter wasn't Jupiter at all, he was St. Martin. Everyone was delighted with the scandal, exaggerating it as much as possible, so that soon the whole town was laughing.

More blue ávo appeared on the streets, dashing about in their cars. On Tolbuchin Avenue they knocked over a sixty-eight year old one-legged knife-grinder and his cart. An ambulance arrived, its sirens shrieking, to take him to hospital; but he was dead by the time they got him there. There were rumours that the police were raiding certain houses and arrests were imminent. A guard was suddenly placed on the door of the Grand Hotel Sabaria in the Square of the Martyrs. For hours no one was allowed in or out, while every room in the hotel was searched.

Most of the forty-six passengers of the cultural bus had lunched in the hotel restaurant, and they were sitting after the meal, according to the time-honoured Hungarian custom, over what should have been their glasses of wine, (but today no wine or beer were served, because the national distributing centre made no provision on Sundays, in accordance with the monthly plan). But there was plenty of rum and raspberry squash, which they were drinking when the Ávo burst in, and they were ordered to show their identity cards. The Ávo behaved like grown-up children, playing hide and seek, searching in the dining-room cupboard to see if anyone was hiding (a large cupboard which had been requisitioned without a penny of compensation to its former owner, together with the building itself and all the furniture). They searched the hotel for several hours unsuccessfully, and then left without having arrested, or even maltreated, anyone.

When they withdrew, two passengers of the cultural bus, named Magos and Vida, went on sipping their rum mixed with the strawberry squash.

"Well, what's your opinion, Colleague Magos?" asked Vida.

"My opinion about what, Colleague Vida?"

"About the situation?"

"Are you out of your wits to ask such a thing?"

"Not at all. You remember, we discussed who was right, the frogs or the swallows?"

Magos refused to answer. There were too many people in the restaurant. Instead he asked for another raspberry squash, this time with a double rum in it. He wasn't interested in either Jupiter or St. Martin. He intended to enjoy his outing in the only possible way, by getting drunk.

Raids were carried out in other restaurants in Stalin

Avenue, where the manager of the nationalized restaurant (an ex-barber) was asked if he had hidden anyone. Although a fervent Party member, he was evidently suspected of something, because he was beaten up and thrown into his own cellar among the empty wine barrels. Some days later, limping badly, his head bandaged, he whispered to the guests that the police had arrested one of his washers-up, a deaf woman who could hardly hear the questions they asked her.

In the beer cellar "Pannonia" in Kisfaludy Street, people were drinking wine when the police arrived. (No one was in the least surprised that in a beer cellar you could get only wine--while in the wine taverns you could get only beer.) The Ávo searched the customers for hidden arms. In a deathly silence, they each had to turn out their pockets. While this was going on, the leader of the gipsy orchestra bravely decided to risk a tune, and they struck up the song "The Gendarme asked me for my Identity Card". The Ávo men seemed to have no objection to this, and the search in the beer cellar became a relatively gay affair. Neither arms nor dollars were discovered, and no one was arrested. In the "Peace Cinema" in Táncsics Street on the other side of the River Perint, the film had started when thirty Ávo men with sten-guns surrounded the building, while others dashed inside. Except for one courting couple, it was empty. It was showing a Soviet film, and the inhabitants of Som-bathely disliked Soviet films.

The sportsground of the Cotton Industry Football Team was outside the town, on the left bank of the Perint. The match with the Advance Team was in progress, and had reached a critical point just before half time, when several squads of Ávo men arrived armed to the teeth. They stopped the game, and announced that the crowd were to disperse through the exit gates where

everyone's identity was to be checked. Fifteen infuriated Cotton Industry fans had their ears boxed. There were considerably more spectators than policemen, two thousand to a hundred, and someone had the courage to shout, "I know what they're up to. They're looking for St. Martin." This caused general hilarity, and the university students shouted back in unison "But St. Martin isn't here!" The crowd shouted and whistled, whether on behalf of St. Martin or the police it would have been hard to tell.

Soon the whole town knew that the match between the Cotton Industry team and the Advance team had been stopped before half-time because of St. Martin. Many of the younger people who were now talking so eagerly of St. Martin had no idea who he was. They had been brought up in the People's Democracy, and for the last eight years had been told, not only that there was no such thing as a saint, but that there was no such thing as a God. The only gods they knew—if such a word could be used—were Marx and Stalin. Not only had they no idea of who St. Martin was, they did not even know that a man of that name had been born in their home town. Nor did they know why some of the older people still called Stalin Avenue and its surroundings "St. Martin's quarter". They may have known that before the liberation a street had been called "St. Martin's Avenue", but the nameplate was then removed, and they had associated this with the expulsion of the Germans.

The Ávo also searched the Turkish baths and the public swimming pool, where they were, it was rumoured, "looking for St. Martin in the bathing cabins".

The search here was less stringent, and the swimmers were neither molested nor were any of them, except for a few suspicious characters, asked to show their identity cards. But all the bathing cabins were searched; and one

Ávo official lay for some time on the ground at the edge of the pool scrutinizing the bottom to see if anyone had somehow secreted himself beneath the water. "St. Martin," people said, "might have put on a frogman's suit." A young mother holding her baby in her arms said to them courageously, "Comrades, the saints are up in heaven. Not down in the water."

The River Perint was searched and the sweetshop in the Comsomol Park turned upside down. In a cottage on the Gyöngyös embankment they pulled an eighty year old woman out of bed, and looked in it to see if she had hidden anyone there. "Ha ha, they didn't find St. Martin in old Mama Frankel's bed," said the people of Szombathely delightedly.

A dog which had tried to prevent the Ávo entering a garden because its owner was not at home, was shot dead at the corner of Pushkin and Szürcsapó Streets. They then opened all doors of all the greenhouses, went through them, and found nothing. They also entered the famous Eölbey house which had once belonged to the Canon of Szombathely. They searched it from top to bottom and even looked in the grand piano and the musical instruments. "They didn't find St. Martin in the double-bass either," said the onlookers.

Even the Institute of the Blind near the old Franciscan church was not spared. Its inhabitants knew that something terrible was going on, if only from the noise the policemen made, rushing up and down past them in the corridors.

For some inexplicable reason they did not search the Dominican church where, according to legend, St. Martin was born in 316 A.D. And yet it was in a district commonly known as the "St. Martin's" district; and in the side chapel was a picture of the Bishop of Tours and St. Martin cutting his cape in half with his sword, to

share it with the beggar. But they entered the cemetery and went into a number of old family crypts. While they were searching these, someone was bold enough to shout, "They don't even know that St. Martin's tomb is in France."

Eighty students from the agricultural college had returned to their quarters in an old chateau known to the people of Szombathely as "the chateau of the owl", after being expelled twice during the afternoon—once from the memorial garden, and once again from the football stadium. They were amazed to have a third visitation from the Ávo, who now carried out a search of their chateau. One student, whose father was a State under-secretary in the Ministry of Housing, had the courage to say, "All right then, go on and ask the stone owl on the doorway where St. Martin is. He might tell you."

They then visited the county hospital, the midwives' institute, the children's hospital, the White Cross hospital and the lung sanatorium in the woods on the outskirts of the town. They examined every patient, even those who were bedridden or on the point of death. Nor did the big factories escape. The nationalized Engel soap factory was especially well searched, so that people were soon saying, "Ah, they thought we'd made soap out of St. Martin."

Then came the turn of the match and the leather factories. There was general surprise that the brick factory was left out, for surely a dozen St. Martins might have been hiding among the heaps of bricks? Nor were the Ávo interested in the cotton factory, nor the lamp-shade factory. On the other hand, the steel plate factory came in for a thorough search, and everything was turned upside down. The ovens of the bread factory were opened and minutely inspected, which gave rise to a number of puns about St. Martin and the baking of bread.



Towards evening big clouds began forming on the horizon, accompanied by loud thunder in the direction of the nearby beauty spot, Oldalag. Some people maintained it was not thunder but artillery. "Now they're turning the big guns on St. Martin," they said.

The cultural bus was due to leave for Budapest at 6 p.m. All the passengers except ten stood there waiting, and although the hour had passed it was still there, in front of the Bishop's Palace. Neither the driver nor the musz girl were to be seen. The windows of the Bishop's Palace were closed and the blinds drawn. Nearby, the bronze statue of the famous Bishop who had built the palace three centuries before sat in his ecclesiastical chair, staring stolidly at the building; while on the steps of his statue a little group of children, two small boys and a girl, squatted. They were less interested in the palace than in the bus and its waiting passengers. In their childish way, they knew that something was wrong. A few minutes before they had been playing in the memorial garden, where the public had been re-admitted after the withdrawal of the Ávo guard at the gate. The older boy had been drawing a charcoal moustache on the face of the Emperor Commodus. They whispered eagerly to one another, waiting for something to happen, half expecting to see the cultural bus passengers suddenly arrested. All day they had heard the grown-ups talking about how Piroska Szabó had been arrested in the memorial garden, because "from time to time St. Martin came to visit her". They had heard, too, about the Ávo searchings in the town, how the poor old stonegrinder had been knocked down, and poor old Mama Frankel pulled out of bed.

"I knew Mama Frankel," said the smaller boy, "She had two cows last year. I went every morning to collect the milk. But then the cows were confiscated because she didn't give *them* enough milk. That's why she's so ill."

The little girl whose fair haired pigtail was tied with a red ribbon looked up with her big blue eyes, and said, "They're cruel to pull her out of her bed when she's ill. Cruel! Cruel!"

The bigger boy who lived in Dimitrov Street said he knew the old seamstress the Ávo had taken away that morning. "She used to talk about St. Martin to everyone," he said. "To me, too."

Suddenly there were signs of movement around the bus, and they stopped talking. The bus girl had arrived with a boy-friend she had picked up in Szombathely. They had been drinking in the Pannonia tavern, dancing to gipsy music, and enjoying one another's company far too much to have any interest in either the Ávo raids or St. Martin. This girl, the daughter of a caretaker in the Seventh Postal District of Budapest, had learnt how to behave like a proper lady in a People's Democracy. To the cheers of the crowd, who had been waiting for hours, she replied with the graciousness of a Swedish filmstar arriving by air in Prague. "A little patience please, good comrades! Just a little patience! And then we'll be off."

The young man beside her added laughingly, "Yes, we're only waiting to learn the result of the battle of Pornóapati."

"Battle of Pornóapati?" said the elder of the two small boys mystified, to his companions.

In the west the thunder continued, but the young man spoke as if the third world war had broken out, and old régime Hungarian gendarmes were trying to fight their way back into Hungary. Still laughing, he went on, "They're looking for the traitors who came with this bus. Seven of them."

This caused great excitement. The children jumped up and slipped through the lilac hedge which divided the episcopal garden from the square, where they listened

open-mouthed to his tale that the great red bus had, this very morning, brought seven traitors from Budapest. "They were hiding arms!" he said. "They had hoped to escape to Austria. They had associates in Szombathely. Not one, but many! Many! Some, moreover, in the Ávo itself. . . ."

The fair-haired IBUSZ girl placed her hand over his mouth. "Stop it, Steve! You've drunk too much."

But Steve had no intention of stopping. He had certainly drunk too much, and he even went on to embroider his tale with picturesque detail. The traitors had attacked a group of green Ávo frontier guards; there had been heavy shooting, many people were wounded, some dead; they had broken through the barbed wire and crossed the minefields into Austria; they had taken away with them important State secrets. Yes, some had got through to Austria; but two had run back near Narda, and the Ávo were now searching for them and their associates in Szombathely. That's why the baker's ovens had all been opened; and the tombs in the cemetery. "They had friends across the border in Austria," he finished melodramatically, "who came to their rescue. That's what the shooting's all about. In Pornóapáti. Listen, can't you hear it?"

Far away in the west, the continuous rumble which the IBUSZ girl maintained was thunder could still be heard.

The cultural passengers looked at one another desperately, to see who was missing, who had started this great battle on either side of the Iron Curtain. And the fair-haired girl succeeded in silencing her young man, by talking authoritatively about the history of the Bishop's Palace. But the passengers of the cultural bus were not interested in the 11th May 1809, when the Hungarian aristocracy, instead of organizing resistance against the

approaching forces of Napoleon, had argued about the colour of their uniforms—with the result that a week later the *avant-garde* of the French army walked in. Napoleon's stepson had been their commander, and had established his headquarters here, in this very palace, where at this moment the Bishop of Szombathely was presumably comfortably installed drinking his wine.

Occasionally her young man, who appeared to have gone into a drunken slumber, woke up and repeated irritably, "I tell you, artillery fire is artillery fire."

But the cultural bus passengers, many of whom had been in Budapest during the siege of 1904, knew what artillery sounded like; they said it was unquestionably thunder. And at this moment, as if to confirm their words, some big drops of rain fell, and the sky was lit up by distant lightning.

"St. Martin is cross," said little Johnny, and he ran off with his companions and hid behind the statue of the bishop, waiting to see what happened.

Evening had come, the square around the Bishop's palace was darkening, and the street lamps came on; but the windows of the Bishop's palace were still shuttered and lightless. On the left, the memorial garden had been closed for the night, and the birds had found their nocturnal perches in the lime and plane trees. The storm, as often happened in these parts, seemed to be moving in the direction of Oldalag, and would probably miss the town. But the façade of the cathedral was occasionally lit up by lightning.

The three officials who had earlier in the day suggested to Comrade Szopor that Páter Nádor, Dr. Kis and Professor Ballagó should act as witnesses, at last arrived with the driver. But perhaps the driver was not a real driver? Whereupon, the fair-haired IBUSZ girl nudged her young man sharply in the ribs to make him stop mumbling

about artillery. The cultural passengers were told to get into the bus, and the IBUSZ girl began counting them. "One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . ." she continued until there were thirty-six. "Comrade," she said turning to the grey faced IBUSZ official, "there are only thirty-six."

"Then we shall wait for the missing three," he said and lit a cigarette.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that is not right. There are not three missing. There are ten. We came with forty-six."

"We are waiting for three passengers," repeated the official. "And the fat priest is one of them."

"Ah that's quite another matter," said the IBUSZ girl, remembering that the three who had been taken to the police station that morning were only witnesses. Of course, she thought the seven others must be the traitors, so they didn't count. She tried to calculate by remembering who had been occupying which seats in the morning, and so identify the missing ones, the traitors. The comrade with the cap and the red carnation who had frightened most of the other passengers was missing. "Good Lord!" she cried involuntarily.

The IBUSZ official turned his back, ignoring this most un-Partylike ejaculation.

The two little boys and the girl who had been hiding behind the lilac hedge approached nearer. "Won't you get into trouble if you get home late?" whispered Johnny to the little girl.

"I'm not living at home," she said quietly. "My daddy and mummy were taken to a concentration camp and our flat has gone. I live with my nanny in Popular Front Street."

"Why did the policemen take your daddy and mummy?"

"They took them because my grandpa is Zsigmond Janiga. You know, who owned the shop, I mean the co-

operative now, on the corner of Forgó Street. When they nationalized the shop, they even took away his hat."

"My daddy was put in the co-operative by force," said Johnny. "First they took away his workshop, with all his shoemaking lasts. He had eight hundred and fifty-six."

The smaller boy shook his head and said firmly, "But the Balog shoes were famous. My uncle told me that he had orders even from Vienna for them. I mean the shoe-maker Balog, your father."

"Anyway he doesn't feel like making shoes any more," said the first child seriously. "He says it's not worth it. . . ."

Time passed and the red cultural bus had still not left Szombathely.

The gloomy IBSZ official went off again to find out when the three missing passengers were coming. It was so late now that it didn't much matter when they left; they wouldn't reach Budapest until well after midnight. The IBSZ girl meanwhile went behind the great door of the Bishop's Palace with her boy-friend, where the three children saw them kissing.

After nearly an hour the official returned, to say that they would wait no longer—neither for the seven traitors who had escaped to Austria, nor for the three witnesses.

The IBSZ girl and the young man said good-bye sentimentally. "God bless you, Comrade. Don't forget what you promised. And don't come to Szombathely only when St. Martin rides a white horse."

The passengers of the cultural bus had no idea what he meant—the local custom that on every 11th November, St. Martin's day, old women predict the winter weather ahead, according to the colour of their roast goose. If the goose is red, the winter will be mild; if it is white, there will be cold and snow, in fact St. Martin "will ride a white horse".

The door closed and the huge red IBSZ bus which had set out with forty-six lucky and contented passengers started the journey back to Budapest, with thirty-six tired and gloomy ones.

The children came out from behind the lilac bushes and watched it leave. "Well, so they've gone," said the little girl, "and we're still here."

"Never mind," said the son of the shoemaker Balog, "what is bad is that I think St. Martin has deserted us."

The smaller boy, who had been the most placid and quiet of them all, said, "But everyone says he'll come back one day."

The little girl with the pretty blue eyes who lived with her nanny in Popular Front Street was chewing a lilac leaf. She found the taste bitter. "Yes," she said, "I heard it too. People say in our street that St. Martin will come back. But we must wait a bit for him. He hasn't any time at the moment. He's very busy in France."